Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2025

https://archive.org/details/twistedskeinnove00ayre

Marion Holmes

February 1881

— " —

A TWISTED SKEIN.

A NOVEL.

BY

ESTHER AYR.

TINSLEY BROTHERS,
CATHERINE STREET, STRAND,
LONDON.

1881.

[*All Rights reserved.*]

COLSTON AND SON, PRINTERS, EDINBURGH.

CONTENTS.

CHAPTER I.

PAGE

'THE FIRST LOOP OF THE KNOT,' 1

CHAPTER II.

DISCUSSIONS, THEOLOGICAL AND OTHERWISE, . . 15

CHAPTER III.

'ERNESTINE,' 29

CHAPTER IV.

LADY ROSS'S BALL, ... 40

CHAPTER V.

A CONQUEST IN TWO SENSES OF THE WORD, . . 54

CHAPTER VI.

MRS ROSS'S GRUEL, ... 74

CHAPTER VII.

'FAMILY JARS,' 88

PAGE

CHAPTER VIII.

'I BELIEVE IN TRUTH AND YOU,' 96

CHAPTER IX.

'TRAITORS WITHIN THE CAMP,' 109

CHAPTER X.

A TRIAL OF FAITH, ... 122

CHAPTER XI.

'VICTORY!' 135

CHAPTER XII.

'THE CALM WHICH PRECEDES A STORM,' . . . 146

CHAPTER XIII.

'EIN WEING ZU SPÄT IST' VIEL ZU SPÄT,' . . . 158

CHAPTER XIV.

FAMILY INTRODUCTIONS, ... 172

CHAPTER XV.

'SHIPWRECK!' 183

CHAPTER XVI.

THREE YEARS AFTER, ... 197

CHAPTER XVII.

'FAREWELL, A LONG FAREWELL,' 212

CHAPTER XVIII.

A VOICE FROM THE PAST, ... 221

A TWISTED SKEIN.

CHAPTER I.

'THE FIRST LOOP OF THE KNOT.'

'OH, there you are at *last*, Dorothy; how late you are. I have been alone so many hours; but, then, healthy people are so selfish, and never think of the weariness that invalids experience when they can't go out. Now, pray, shut the door, and don't come near me with your damp things on, you'll give me a cold; go and change them quickly.'

'It is not wet to-night, mamma; it is quite lovely out, and a hard frost. My jacket is perfectly dry.'

'When will you give up arguing, my dear? You make me quite ill with your perpetual discussions. I believe you would argue with

the undertaker over your own coffin. Now, don't stay upstairs for an hour, Dorothy,' called out the invalid, as her daughter left the room. 'I want you to read to me; I am tired of my own society.'

Dorothy Ross was a bright little thing, and the expression of her face was generally a pleasant one; but as she ran upstairs, there was a scornful look about the mouth, and a frown on the forehead. When she got up to her own room, she gave a little stamp, and exclaimed to herself, 'Healthy people are selfish, are they? Then I should think they catch it from living with invalids. It's hard to come in every evening from a long day's study and hear the same grumbling and fault-finding. Oh, dear! I felt so bright when I came along the street, and directly I get inside this house I go down to my boots, and feel so depressed and wicked. I am sure there must be what they call "antipathetic electricity" between mamma and me! I wonder if Mr Jefferies will come in to-night? I must get that old reading done before tea in case he does.' And giving her hair a little smoothing, and arranging her collar and dress, so that Mrs Ross might have nothing to complain of, Dorothy ran downstairs.

Just as she reached the last flight, she met a young man coming up, and Dorothy stopped, put out her hand, and then made a sign to him not to make a noise.

He smiled, and said, 'What's the matter—another row?'

'No,' answered she; 'but if mamma hears your voice she will say I am dawdling. I've got to read to her now till tea-time.'

'Can we have a lesson to-night, Miss Ross?' he inquired, still speaking in a whisper, as she had done.

'Oh yes, please; but don't come before eight,' was her rejoinder; and then, with a smile and an *au revoir*, she passed him and went into her mother's sitting-room.

And while Dorothy is reading to her mother we may as well give a slight sketch of their history and explain their present circumstances.

Mrs Ross had been a handsome woman when quite young. She was the daughter of the English consul at Madrid, and there fell in love with and married a young man, heir to a baronetcy in England, and *attaché* at the British embassy in Madrid. He was afterwards appointed consul at Cadiz, and had lived there with his wife for some years without having any family, but his health gave way, and he was obliged to come to England, where his father made a home for him in the family country seat of Woodhurst, Kent, and which, of course, was his own future inheritance.

Great were the rejoicings, therefore, when Mrs Ross was about to become a mother, and immense hopes were centred on the child, whom every one expected would be a son.

It was a daughter, however, and Mrs Ross never forgave it for its unlucky sex. It did turn out very unfortunately for her, as her husband died quite suddenly one night, six months after Dorothy's birth, leaving his father still in enjoyment of the title, and so the property passed to the second son, Alexander, and after him to his son Dudley, for of course Mrs Alexander Ross had more sons than daughters, and was very pleased that her boy Dudley, who, she had supposed, would be obliged to earn his daily bread by hard work, should be the succeeding baronet, and she could therefore afford to be graciously compassionate of her disappointed sister-in-law.

It was rather a hard fate on the elder Mrs Ross, after having lived at Woodhurst, and been treated by servants and friends alike as the future Lady Ross, to be obliged, at the death of her husband, to yield her position to her young brother-in-law, and it really soured her whole subsequent life; and she gradually fretted herself into a chronic nervous invalid, making her poor little daughter's young life a very sad and trying one, and alienating herself from all her relations by her moroseness and bitter treatment of them.

Sir Alexander had been very good and considerate to his sister-in-law, and had begged her to make a home for herself and her daughter with him at Woodhurst, and then, as she would not hear of that, he offered to

educate Dorothy, so as to leave more margin for Mrs Ross to live comfortably wherever she chose. This offer was accepted, and Dorothy Ross was sent first to a very good boarding school, and then lived at home with her mother in London, and went to Queen's College, where she received a thoroughly first-rate education, for she was a clever, intelligent girl, and very anxious to earn enough by her brains to make her independent of her uncle. Her mother never let her go and stay with her cousins at Woodhurst, and it was a dull, dreary life for a young girl, never having any change from the dingy lodgings in Bayswater, and scarcely seeing any friends but those she made at Queen's. Mrs Ross was somewhat of a screw as well, and it was quite as much for parsimonious reasons as those of sentiment that she refused to let her daughter mix with her cousins, or live herself in a more cheerful house, and with more luxuries round her. But the one disappointment of her life had so warped her mind that she had only one idea, and that was, as she used to express it to Dorothy,—

'My dear, we are decayed gentlewomen. Let us not, therefore, mistake our position, and behave as if we had the right to live extravagantly. If you had only been a boy, all would have been different. As it is, we must submit to our fate, always remembering that a dignified exclusiveness is our proper attitude to those we are thrown with.'

Poor Dorothy did not at all like the 'dignified exclusiveness,' and could not understand why they should be so much more miserable than heaps of people she met who she knew had less income than themselves. Of course she had never been disappointed, and she had not chosen to be a girl, so she could not quite sympathise with her mother's regret over the past. But when a young medical student came to lodge at the same house with the Rosses, and after passing Dorothy day after day on the stairs for some months in silence, he one day found a book of hers that she had dropped, and was obliged to speak to her the next time. That led to further conversation, Dorothy asked him to come and see her mother, and was only too pleased to have another element in the house, and hailed him as a deliverer from many dull and dreary evenings spent in listening to grumblings and moanings over their 'cruel fate.' So Bruce Jefferies became a frequent visitor in the Rosses' drawing-room, and a very kind assistant to Dorothy in many of her studies. Reading on this particular evening was very distasteful to Dorothy, the book was very dry, and her mother particularly inattentive, often requiring the same passage to be read twice over before she heard it. Once too, Dorothy, who was thinking about her coming Latin lesson with Bruce, made a slip of the tongue, and for 'student of divinity at Brasenose,' she unconsciously read 'student of medicine at St Thomas'.'

'*What do you say*, Dorothea?' interrupted her mother rather sharply. 'I do wish, child, you would read attentively, I am sure Bishop —— was never a medical student!'

'No, mamma, I beg your pardon,' said Dorothy, much confused at her mistake, 'I was thinking of something else; I meant to say "student of divinity." Here's tea!' she exclaimed with a sigh of relief, and threw down the venerable bishop's 'Memoir and Letters' with a gesture of disgust. She did not dare tell her mother that 'the medical student' of her reverie was coming in at eight o'clock, and yet she knew she must say something about it before he appeared, so she ate her tea in silence cogitating how to announce the fact.

Mrs Ross at last said, in an injured tone,—

'I think you might make yourself a more interesting companion, Dolly, when you go about and see so much, and I am obliged to stay here all by myself and see nobody. Can't you think of anything to talk about?'

'I am very sorry, mamma,' answered Dolly. 'I was thinking over my Latin grammar. Mr Jefferies is kindly coming to give me a lesson this evening,'

It was fortunately rather dark at the tea table, so Mrs Ross did not notice the blush which accompanied these last words and the vigorous way in which Dolly began cutting the loaf, she merely answered coldly,—

'When you spend your whole day poring

over books, I can't see why you should monopolise Mr Jefferies's time of an evening teaching you Latin. I am sure it must bore him horribly, and I shall beg him not to trouble about it any more after to-night.'

Dolly was on the point of exclaiming something indignant, but restrained herself, and said demurely instead, 'Yes, mamma, perhaps it does bore him.'

If an outsider could have looked in about nine o'clock and seen the little party in Mrs Jones's best sitting-room, perhaps he would hardly have thought any pity necessary for Mr Jefferies. Dorothy's graceful little head was bent over her book, all attention now and intelligence, and he sitting by her, pointing out to her with great patience all the intricacies of the third declension, his pale, intellectual face, with its deep-set brown eyes, and his dark hair and beard forming a great contrast to her brighter colouring, for Dorothy had inherited her father's light, reddish hair and hazel eyes; her face was round like a child's, and her complexion as clear and fresh as you could wish to see.

After a long spell of grammatical explanation, Jefferies laid his hand on the book and said, 'Now, Miss Ross, you have had enough; you are tired, I am sure.' But his tone was bright, and no one could have accused him of even *looking* bored; but Mrs Ross, on the watch for her opportunity, and anxious to put a

stop to these very engrossing lessons, partly from a selfish motive of not liking to be left out, and partly from a dread of her daughter learning something more serious than Latin conjugations, endorsed Mr Jefferies's opinion that Dolly must be tired, and sent her daughter to the piano, to 'rest her eyes and brain' she said.

Dolly could not hear what her mother was saying to Bruce while she was playing, but she was sure it was something ungracious by the stiff tone of his reply, 'As you wish, Mrs Ross, I have no desire to overwork your daughter,' he said, and moved over to the piano, where he kept Miss Ross playing for more than half-an-hour. It was the one thing she excelled in, and she seemed to put her whole soul into her music. At last she got up, saying she was tired, and her mother rose from the sofa and looked at the clock, remarking that it was very late.

Mr Jefferies took this as a signal for him to retire, so he said 'Good night' to Mrs Ross, and, as he shook hands with Dolly, added, 'Thank you for a very great treat, Miss Ross; your music always does me good.'

She smiled, and answered, 'I am very glad it pleases you,' and then they all three left the drawing-room—he for his own little den downstairs, and the two ladies for their respective bedrooms.

When Dolly had seen her mother to her room, however, she ran down again to the

drawing-room, and, taking a letter out of her pocket, she sat down by the fire to read it. The lamp was still burning, and the room looked cosy and inviting. It was just the time, too, for a quiet talk with some confidential friend, and Dolly could not help wishing she had some one just then to keep her company, for she did not feel inclined to go to bed, and she could not very well ask the landlady to come and talk to her.

A knock at the door, and, as if by magic, a companion appeared in the shape of the young doctor. 'I beg your pardon, Miss Ross, I thought you had gone to bed,' he said very apologetically. 'I left my spectacles here, and cannot study without them, so I thought I might venture to come and fetch them without feeling guilty of a very great intrusion.'

'Oh!' exclaimed Dolly, 'I was just wishing—' and then stopped, not liking to add, 'for some one to talk to.'

'Wishing what?' he asked. 'Wishing you had some one to poke your fire for you, was it?' and he took up the poker as he spoke, preparatory to stirring the fire.

'Oh, Mr Jefferies, *don't!*' cried Dolly, 'mamma will hear you, and I am supposed to be in bed, but I was so cold, and not a bit sleepy, I thought I would come down and have a warm and a good *think*.'

'And I have disturbed you; I am so sorry, but—'

'Not at all. I wish you would sit down and get warm too, and, Mr Jefferies, do tell me what mamma said to you this evening while I was playing? I knew by your voice that it was something disagreeable.'

Bruce coloured, and replied,—

'You have quick ears to detect my feelings in my voice, Miss Ross. Your mother does not like me, I know; so I think I ought perhaps to give up teaching you Latin.'

Dolly's face fell.

'Oh, nonsense, mamma likes you very much—at least she doesn't say she *dislikes* you, which comes to the same thing with her—but I am afraid she thinks it tires and bores you to come up after a hard day's work, and drum a lot of rules of grammar into my stupid head, and so do I;' and Dolly got red, and began poking about the coals, and tapping them in a leisurely sort of way for something to do.

'Do you *really* think it bores me, Miss Ross?' Jefferies asked earnestly; and he got up from his chair, and stood by the fire, looking straight down at her.

Dolly could not lift up her eyes and say, 'Yes, *really*,' so she went on playing with the fire, and said slowly, 'Well, I daresay it *is* a bore to you; but I am afraid if mamma had not suggested it, I should never have thought of it.'

'Then I hope, as you never would have originated such a thought, you will forget the suggestion as soon as possible,' he answered

with some warmth; 'I am not a humbug, Miss Ross, and you may trust me not to come up here and give you lessons after I find it bores me. I am afraid, though, I sha'n't be able to come again for some time, as my every spare hour must be occupied now in study. You know I hope to take my degree in a month's time, and I must work awfully hard till then. You wish me to succeed—don't you, Miss Ross?'—the young man said, with pleading voice, and still standing over her.

'Yes,' Dolly said, simply; but she looked up, and their eyes met, and in that single instant she learnt something which she never forgot; but not a word more was spoken, she got up from her low seat, and held out her hand, which he took for a second, then opened the door for her, and she went upstairs in silence, and left him standing there, feeling as if suddenly a vision of heaven had been opened to him—he could not have told why.

It is extraordinary how one look can alter the fate of a lifetime. Two people may see each other day after day, and talk together for hours without noticing anything particular in each other's eyes, till suddenly the magic spring is touched, and an indescribable expression reveals the fact that the two *souls* are in communion with each other, though no language can be heard, and after that it is impossible to return to the former state of intercourse.

I know nothing more intoxicating than the

sudden flash of soul-sympathy from the eyes of another. Sometimes, 'tis true, the look is one of inquiry and research, and the answering flash is not quite of the same nature; but where soul answers soul the thrill is instantaneous and the result irrevocable. Personalities are swamped in such moments as these, and for one brief instant we can realise the truth of the saying, that 'There is neither marrying nor given in marriage, for they are as the angels of God' in the spirit-world, for spirit communes with spirit, and the union is *eternal* in that it becomes *essential.*

When Bruce got down to his own dingy, little room, such a contrast to the pretty cosy one he had left upstairs, he sat down and thought out his position. 'What right have I, he mused, to love that girl when I have no position to offer her, no prospects of anything brighter than the stagnation of a country doctor's life—for I suppose I shall never get any better practice? She is so clever, and bright, and full of life and vigour, I couldn't ask her to share my struggling fate. Men are selfish brutes when they entice a girl to leave a home which has no struggle for one which is often too burdensome altogether for them, and I am afraid I should never have the conceit to believe a girl ready to do it either merely for love of *me*—in expressing which sentiment Bruce was exceptional, for the case of a man who does not think the felicity of

sharing *his* home sufficient to recompense *any* woman for her sacrifice, is rare, indeed.

Perhaps it is this conceit which populates the world, for did not men believe so readily in their own irresistibility, half the marriages in Christendom would not be made. Three-quarters of the dejection shown by men on their rejection by the lady of their choice, is due, I firmly believe, to wounded vanity and unutterable astonishment at the want of appreciation shown of themselves ; there is no love so true as to be free from all *self* love, and Bruce Jefferies was only the exception which proves the rule in this respect.

CHAPTER II.

DISCUSSIONS, THEOLOGICAL AND OTHERWISE.

A MONTH passed, and Dorothy Ross and her mother lived the same monotonous life, scarcely ever varying the routine of the day by the reception or payment of visits, which mostly introduce some sort of fresh element into the daily life. Beyond the curate of the parish and an old lady friend, no one interrupted the *tête-à-têtes* between mother and daughter. Dolly could not bear the Rev. Pelham Darell, and this grieved Mrs Ross, who rather fostered that cleric's admiration for her daughter; and thought he might, if he got a decent living, prove a 'parti' for her, if all other hopes failed. Poor Pelham Darrell! he had not much chance with self-willed, impious Miss Dolly! He used to try and 'awaken' her, and frighten her into a conviction of his opinions, but all in vain; and he always went home to bed, good, worthy man, with less confidence in his own powers of persuasion than he set out with, and feeling, more-

over, a kind of uncomfortable conviction that Miss Ross quizzed him and treated him with satire. He squinted, and had a lisp, so my readers will forgive Dolly's want of readiness to fall in love with him, and the creed he held out to her as her only chance of escape from the hands of the arch-bogie was so hard and stern a one that it utterly failed to reach her, so that Bruce Jefferies and his unorthodox books gained more influence over her each time the curate had been attempting to convert her.

'Your daughter holds, I fear, some very unsound views, Mrs Ross,' the curate said one day, after a long argument with Dolly on the origin of evil. 'She attempts with her puny—I beg her pardon, I mean human—intellect to fathom the counsels of the Almighty. As if we miserable, puny worms were intended to reason about things spiritual and not take them with simple faith.'

It was a favourite epithet this 'puny worms' with Mr Darrell, and one which used to provoke more opposition in Dolly than anything—to begin with, she hated to be classed collectively at all; and to be thought no finer creature than the lowest of animal organisms, was —*scarcely* a compliment! Dolly rather liked having an argument with him, though, occasionally. Not that he *could* argue, of course, for he, like all others of his particular creed, held that to reason with the intellect was one of the deadly sins; and he frequently told Dolly if she

were to try and fathom the counsels of the Almighty she would speedily become an infidel. This used to make Dolly very angry, and she said to him one day,—

'I am sorry, Mr Darrell, that your faith is so very weak that it won't bear the slightest investigation or sifting. I should be very dissatisfied with a belief which had to be so carefully wrapped up and taken care of, that the first breath of infidelity would blow it away. The real fact is that the doctrines you do hold are so thoroughly untenable, that you *know* they are unsound from the very core. I don't blame you personally for holding them, but I am sure you would be far happier if you had a faith which you were quite *certain* no enemy could vitally destroy, and no heresy radically injure. I was reading to-day an exact description of your creed. Look here, you say that "Faith is the gift of God; no one can believe at will, but only as God gives him grace to do so;" but if you do not believe you are damned, and God punishes you for what He will not bestow. How you can go to bed every night and resign yourself to the guardianship of such a Being—(I cannot call Him a Father, for He is more like a fiend)—I cannot imagine!'

'But, my dear Miss Ross, we cannot call anything that God does *wicked*. It may seem to our poor finite minds mysterious and incomprehensible; but we believe He is perfect, and that is enough.'

'Then what is to be our standard and example of perfection, Mr Darrell? Are we not to copy the character of God as nearly as we can, and how can we do this if at every turn we are pulled up by our consciences revolting against following the pattern—as they must assuredly do if the line of conduct ascribed to God were prescribed for us? Why does such a doctrine even *appear* to us unrighteous if it is not so? From whence do we get our instincts of right and wrong, if not from the divine promptings of the spirit within us? We have no guarantee that I can see from your point of view, that *anything* we admire as goodness, and purity and truth, is so in reality. It is just as likely to be upset and proved wrong, as that what seems wrong is in reality right. If God is indeed capable of such caprice and injustice, and yet we are not allowed to believe it possible, how can we understand when we are told that He is love and mercy and justice?'

'Miss Ross,' replied the curate, quite at a loss for a confutation of these arguments, 'I cannot answer your questions. I dare not let my reason run away with my spirit. If I were to lose hold of my present creed, where should I find myself? I could not live without religion, and as a preacher of the gospel how could I upset my whole belief in Calvinism and start afresh?'

'But surely it would be better in the end to

throw over so feeble a faith, and, instead of stifling your doubts, to bring them to the light and look at them boldly, and fight them out with the weapon of the all-prevailing Spirit of God, Mr Darrell? Is it not possible that you may have got hold of a wrong side of truth, and that there is a real living Christianity in the world which you may embrace without any fear of man's arguments upsetting it? You are like a man who in time of war shuts himself up in a cellar, and hides from the enemy for fear of death, instead of standing out on the battlements ready for any attack on his fortress, knowing that he is stronger than the enemy, and that his outworks are *invincible.* Do let me just read you this little quotation from one of our greatest Lights of the English Church,*—"God cannot be divided. He is one God, not many. He must be served by all our nature, not by a part of it. The intellect must seek Truth with undivided, fearless zeal, else we do not serve God with our whole mind and understanding. The bodily powers must be guarded and saved for the healthy discharge of all that Providence requires of us in our passage through life, else we do not serve Him with our whole strength. The affection must be kept fresh and pure, else we do not serve Him with our whole heart. The conscience must not have stained itself with secret sins, unworthy

* Dean Stanley.

transactions and false pretences, else we do not serve Him with our whole soul. . . . The true religion of Jesus Christ our Saviour is that which penetrates and receives all the warmth of the heart, all the elevation of the soul, all the energies of the understanding, and all the strength of the will." Isn't that grand, Mr Darrell?'

'Miss Ross, your opinions pain me; I fear you are influenced by the terrible Rationalistic tendencies of the age. If you would only be content to know nothing here, and wait for God's revelation of it all hereafter. Do you know that hymn,—

> "Oh to be nothing, nothing,
> Only to lie at His feet,
> A broken and emptied vessel
> For the Master's use made meet?"'

'A noble aim, truly, Mr Darrell,' replied Dolly, with some indignation in her voice. 'If we are put into this world to do nothing, and learn nothing, and be nothing, it surely can't be worth your while to spend your life teaching men anything. I really would spare myself the trouble if I were you. According to your own creed, a man cannot be saved through preaching, and he has no free will to enable to believe in God when he would like to do so. You say we must wait until God chooses to elect us, so I don't see on what grounds you go to work at all.'

Mrs Ross here interrupted the argument by

coming into the room with a letter in her hand, and looked vexed at seeing Dolly holding forth as usual, instead of listening with meek reverence to the words of wisdom which she thought fell from Mr Pelham Darrell's lips.

'Arguing again, Dorothy!' she exclaimed. 'When I was a girl I was taught to respect a clergyman's opinions too much to attempt to argue with him; but young people now-a-days are so forward, and think themselves so wise there is no subduing them.'

'I assure you, Mrs Ross,' interposed the curate, who, notwithstanding Dolly's merciless attack on himself, was too staunch an admirer not to defend her if necessary, 'Miss Dorothy and I have had quite a pleasant talk, and it does me good to hear the other side of a question which interests me so deeply. Some day, I have no doubt, we shall find we agree very well, and it is very good of your daughter to let me know so much of what she thinks.'

'Bravo, Rev. Pelham!' ejaculated Dolly, mentally, then aloud she added, 'Thank you, Mr Darrell, for listening so patiently to my harangue. I am afraid the "gift of the gab" is too much mine. *You* shall talk next time, and I will listen.' ('Far distant may that next time be,' she inwardly prayed.)

Mr Darrell then took his leave, saying he had a meeting to attend, and, when he had shut the door behind him, Mrs Ross exclaimed in a pettish voice,—

'How long had you kept that wretched man on his legs, Dorothy, while you were explaining your peculiar views?'

'How long, mamma? Oh, I don't know. Perhaps an hour,' answered her daughter, with a mischievous twinkle in her eyes. 'It does him good to hear some other arguments than his own. He is very good fun in his own way, and I enjoyed his society very much to-day. My intellect was clear, and I was able to give him some logic—which is more than he could give me. Poor dear! he is very good, but very weak on his theological legs. What do you think of this hymn, mamma?' and Dolly repeated the verse Mr Darrell had quoted to her.

'My dear, it is not for me to criticise what a good, holy man like Mr Darrell teaches you. I wish you would give up reasoning with him. It is very disrespectful to him as a minister of God, and very presumptuous of you as a woman as well.'

'H'm,' grunted Dolly, 'though I am a woman, I don't see why I should be sat upon, theologically or otherwise. But what's that letter, mamma? Isn't it Aunt Laura's handwriting?'

'Yes, it is. Read it. I am very worried about it.'

Dolly read as follows :—

'Dear Anne,—It is some time since we have heard anything of you, and I am glad

that we shall now have an opportunity of meeting shortly, for I am coming up to town in a week or two, with Janet and Constance, to Eaton Square for the season, and I shall hope to have the pleasure of seeing both you and Dorothy very often. My son Dudley is abroad, but we hope he will join us later in the season.—With kind love, I remain, your affectionate sister,

'Laura Ross.'

'Why are you worried, mamma?' asked Dolly. 'It is a very kind note, and I think it will be rather jolly having Aunt Laura in town. I wonder if my cousins are nice, or whether they will snub poor shabby little me?'

'It is just that, Dolly, that worries me,' replied her mother. 'I know your aunt so well, and I expect Janet and Constance are very like her. They will *patronise* us. And one thing you *shall* do, Dolly, you shall dress yourself properly. That garment you have on is not fit for a lady's-maid to wear. What do you do with your money? You ought to have plenty to spend.'

'What is the matter with this dress, mamma? I am sure I don't care to try and look as much of a swell as my cousins. If they only like me for my clothes, I am sure I hope they will never come near me.'

'You do run away with such odd notions, Dorothy. I only say you must not disgrace

your father's name by appearing in Eaton Square in that horrid old blue thing—you look as if you belonged to the middle ages in it, and I won't have Laura saying I dress you badly. She will offer to *give* you a dress, no doubt, and I couldn't stand that.'

'No more could I, mamma, you may be quite sure of *that*,' said Dolly, and at the same time gave a loving look at the reflection of herself in the glass, the explanation of which was simply that Bruce Jefferies had one day told her she looked like an old picture of Saint Cecilia in that much-despised blue gown, her soft, fluffy, reddish hair forming a sort of light halo round her head, and her hands resting on the piano keys at the time had further added to the resemblance.

Mrs Ross gave her daughter no peace until she had ordered herself two new dresses, and strict injunctions were sent privately to the dressmaker to make them as stylish as possible, without being *smart*,—'For Laura is a queer woman,' Mrs Ross said to herself, 'and if Dolly were too well dressed, she would say, sarcastically, that she was *glad* we had so much money to spend on dress.'

Of course, as luck would have it, a fortnight after the arrival of Lady Ross's letter, Dolly came in one afternoon about four o'clock, as usual, and, as soon as she entered the hall, was greeted with a strong smell of 'ylang-ylang' essence, and—'Aunt Laura, as sure as fate!' she

exclaimed. Without waiting to go and change her dress, as she, no doubt, ought to have done before appearing in the drawing-room, in she went, just as she was, in her offensive blue gown, black scarf tied artistically round her shoulders, and large, picturesque soft black hat, looking really much prettier in those old clothes than she would have done in her stiff new costume, which was lying upstairs waiting for this opportunity of being worn.

But directly Dolly opened the door she felt her mistake. There was her aunt, dressed as faultlessly as if she were a Parisian model, and her two cousins, dittos of their mother in their own style, all three sitting with company faces on, trying to be pleasant and friendly, no doubt, but looking terribly bored and ill at ease. Her mother was the object which caught Dolly's eye first. She had evidently been surprised by their visit in the middle of her afternoon nap, and had started up off the sofa to receive her visitors, for her cap was all awry, and an antimacassar had caught on to her dress, making her look, poor thing, inexpressibly comical, and Dolly gave herself great credit for not bursting into fits of laughter. Of course, when she entered in that costume of hers, Mrs Ross frowned furiously at her, and would have had her disappear, but it was too late, and Dolly did her best to make things smoother all round. She went up and kissed her aunt and cousins, and said brightly,—

'It is a long time since we've met, Aunt Laura, and I daresay you would not have known me again,' and then she took a seat by one of her cousins, and tried to draw her out and make conversation.

The ordeal only lasted about ten minutes longer, and then Lady Ross got up to go. She paused at the door as she went out, and said to Dolly,—

'You must come and spend the day with us soon, my dear. I will send a maid for you, of course, and send you home again, so I hope your mother will spare you sometimes.'

'Oh, thanks, Aunt Laura,' said Dolly, rather brusquely; 'I am afraid just now I am so busy with my college exams. that I couldn't possibly spare the time; but I need never trouble you to send for me. I go everywhere by myself; and I shall just jump into the Underground and get out at Sloane Square, and there I am quite close to you.'

'Oh, very well, my dear, as you please,' rejoined Lady Ross, stiffly. 'I am sure Dudley will be delighted to hear you are working so hard and making such good use of your time. Good-bye,'—and she swept downstairs, and her daughters after her; the door banged, and the carriage drove way; and the dreaded visit was over.

But all was not over; and Dolly felt instinctively that a storm was brewing as she shut the door after her aunt. Mrs Ross was quite hys-

terical when they had all disappeared, and launched out in the bitterest invectives against fate,—her own deceased husband, for leaving her a widow, her sister-in-law, and lastly, but by no means least, against the unfortunate Dolly.

'How *could* you be so utterly wanting in all proper feeling as to come in when you must have known they were here, in that horrible attire? You don't pay the slightest respect to my wishes; and if you choose to go about looking like—like—I don't know *who*' (she could not find a disreputable enough comparison!)—'there is no reason why you should take a pride in showing yourself like that to your aunt; there, I have gone to the great expense of buying you two new dresses, and yet you persist in wearing that nasty blue one, which, I tell you, isn't fit for a dusting sheet.'

'But, mamma,' answered poor little Dolly, as soon as she could get in a word, 'how could I tell that Aunt Laura was here; you wouldn't have me wear my new dress for college, would you? and if I had gone and changed this one I should not have been in time to see them. I don't believe they noticed my dress a bit—oh, how I did enjoy telling Aunt Laura I went about by myself! Her face, when I said "Underground Railway," was lovely! It was nasty of her though, wasn't it, to remind me, as she did, that Dudley pays for my college expenses. I shall soon be clear of them now, my lady,

and then I sha'n't trouble your son further. Oh, mother, I am very glad we are poor, it's much jollier; let's have a nice cosy evening, and forget those stupid old people. I am going to toast you a muffin now. I am sure Janet and Constance don't know the delights of toasting muffins.'

But Mrs Ross was too thoroughly upset by her sister-in-law's unexpected visit to be soothed so easily by her bright, cheery little girl. She never could forget that it was *she* who ought to have been Lady Ross, and her sister-in-law the poor relation, and she felt as if she had been cheated by Fate all through her life—first in losing the title for herself, and then in not having a son to succeed in lieu of his father, and on this special evening she was so full of morbid regrets over the irrevocable, and such a wholly depressing companion, that Dolly was thankful when she announced her intention, about nine o'clock, of going to bed and drowning her sorrows in sleep.

CHAPTER III.

'ERNESTINE.'

'DEAR JEFFERIES,—A bad accident just come in, will you be good enough to attend to it for me, and report it presently. I cannot possibly leave my case.—F. B.'

A note, with these words written in pencil, was handed to Bruce Jefferies one afternoon as he was going his rounds in St Thomas' Hospital, and he hurried down to the accident ward to comply with his friend and superior's Dr Bury's request. The patient was an old woman, evidently tolerably well off, though not a lady, and it proved that she had been overturned in a hansom, and concussion of the brain had ensued. No other injuries, beyond a bruise or two, had she received, however, and Bruce was more hopeful of her recovery when he had examined her than he had been at first. He wondered who she was, and whether she had any relations who would be anxious about her, and feeling in her pocket for a letter or paper

which should give him her name and address, on the fly-leaf of an old pocket-book he found written, 'Rosalind Clark, Frivolity Theatre, Strand.'

'That's too old an address to find her now,' he thought, and proceeded to scan the book, hoping to find some more recent memoranda. 'Ernestine's first night.' 'Ernestine much applauded.' 'Ernestine engaged to Tilbury.' 'Received of Tilbury £20.'

These were all entries in diary-style throughout the book. At last Bruce came to this one, 'moved on 3d January to Pembroke Road with E.'

'Ah! this will be the address, he said to himself. I will call at Pembroke Road and inform this "Ernestine," whoever she is, of this old lady's illness—her daughter, I suppose, and both evidently in the theatrical line.'

Accordingly, about two hours after, when he had reported the case to Dr Bury and given it over to the nurse's care, he called a hansom and drove straight to the old woman's home. The door was opened by a dirty, miserable-looking girl, and Bruce instinctively prayed that this might not be 'Ernestine.'

'Mrs or Miss Clark?' he inquired.

'There ain't no Miss Clark,' responded the girl. 'Mrs Clark went out afore dinner, and ain't come 'ome yet, but Miss Franklin's at 'ome. You can see *'er* if yer like,' and with

this gracious invitation Bruce proceeded to take off his hat and coat and follow the servant upstairs.

She opened the drawing-room door and announced him as 'A gen'leman to see you, miss,' and he felt exceedingly bashful and awkward on finding himself introduced thus unceremoniously to a very slight, ladylike-looking, handsome girl, who rose graciously from her low seat by the window and came forward to receive him. She could not be that vulgar-looking old Mrs Clark's daughter, thought Bruce. How should he break the news to her; would she faint, or cry, or go into hysterics, he wondered. But he had not long to wonder, for he could not keep her standing looking interrogatively at him, and he stammered out, 'An unwarrantable intrusion, Miss—Franklin—but your—your—I mean a Mrs Clark, who, I believe, lives here, has met with an accident, and is in St Thomas', and I thought you might be anxious to hear the news.'

Miss Franklin held out her hand, and said quietly, 'She is my aunt. Thank you very much for coming to tell me. Please sit down, if you are not pressed for time, and give me more details;' and, taking a seat herself, she motioned Bruce to one, and he proceeded to give her as lucid an account of the accident as he could, having only heard the nurse's version of it, and that had been already filtered through

two other people, so he could not vouch for the truth of it all, and tried, in fact, to say as little as possible of what had occurred before, and confined himself to reporting the actual state of the case as he had found it.

'She keeps repeating the name of Ernestine, Miss Franklin,' he said. 'I don't know if that is you?'

'Yes, I am Ernestine Franklin. I am an orphan, and live with this aunt of mine. May I go to her now?' she asked.

'Not to-night, please,' he replied, rising to go; 'if you like to come to-morrow morning about twelve, I shall be there, and shall be most happy to show you the way to your aunt. I am very anxious she should be kept quiet to-night, and I am sure you will see that I am reasonable in wishing it. Good evening, Miss Franklin. I am sorry to have had to be the bearer of this news, but I really think your aunt will do well, and you must not distress yourself about her.'

There was something very uncommon about Ernestine Franklin, and Bruce felt unaccountably fascinated by her face. She was so quiet and dignified, and there was a look of sadness round her mouth which was almost tragic, while her eyes were bright, and capable of immense variety of expression. It was altogether a face of much power, and Bruce *felt* she was an actress. He could fancy her an artist in her profession, and quite longed to see her on the stage.

She asked him his name, that she might know it next day when she applied at the hospital to see Mrs Clark, and while she was writing it down on paper, he had time to study her surroundings, and take in a little more of her circumstances.

His own mother had been an actress, or hardly that, but she was '*première danseuse*' at one of the opera houses for two seasons, and the stage and its votaries always interested him greatly.

The room, he noticed, was shabbily but theatrically furnished, and might once have looked pretty. The blue draperies round the mantelpiece and looking-glass were faded now, and the lace round the edge had evidently been washed more than once. There was nothing inartistic in the arrangement of the room, however, and nothing to offend even a fastidious eye.

On one of the small tables stood a large rococo frame, which Bruce went up to examine, and was startled beyond measure to find it contained a picture of his own mother in one of her theatrical costumes. Yes, there was no mistaking it. Her name, 'Lizzie de Brousa,' was written underneath it, and he could not fail to recognise a strong likeness to himself in the small childish face of the picture before him. She had the same dark eyes, but without his intellectual expression, the same thick dark eyebrows, and high, rather square fore-

head. The lower part of her face was totally different. Bruce had a wide mouth, a short, firm, classical chin, and rather a long neck, while his mother had full, pouting lips, and a very round, almost heavy chin, which receded somewhat, and gave her whole face an impression of weakness of character, which was a true one, for poor little Lizzie de Brousa had been very like a butterfly in her short career.

Educated for a stage-dancer, her whole mind had been set on excelling in her particular art. She lived for the applause which her '*entrechats*' and '*pirouettes*' called down, and, when one day the manager of the opera-house called upon her and informed her of his wish to engage her for the season as '*première danseuse*,' her cup of joy seemed full, and for two short seasons she basked in the sunshine of her popularity, not caring for the money she earned, except for what it could enable her to buy, and living from day to day a happy, careless life, loving every one who was kind to her, and taking life as easily and naturally as a child does, and with as much innocence of evil. Poor little girl! She was only nineteen at the end of her second season, and she fell only too easily into the hands of a man, well known on the stage for his unreliable character, who persuaded her that she loved him, and finally got her to marry him. But he bullied her so when once he had made her his own lawful possession, that the slight, tender spirit broke

under his treatment, and when she awoke one miserable morning two years after to find her husband had deserted her and gone off to Australia, the shock was too much for her poor little frame, and she died—of rapid decline, the doctor said—of a broken heart *she* would have said, leaving her baby, only a month old, to be nursed by a kind neighbour until the father should be informed of his son's existence, and provide a suitable home for him.

Hers was a common enough story, poor thing! Who has not heard a similar one over and over again in his life? A sweet, pure flower taken rudely from its surroundings, and left to pine and fade. Such natures as Lizzie's are not made for a long struggle. Sunshine is as necessary to them as oxygen, and when deprived of what makes them bright and happy and beautiful, their charm is lost too, their fascination is gone, and God has to transplant them into the garden watered by His smile and tended by His love.

Bruce was so much absorbed in his mother's picture that he did not notice Miss Franklin, who had left the writing-table, and come close up to him. Her voice startled him as she inquired,—

'Do you know that picture, Mr Jefferies?'

'I have seen it before, I think,' he answered shortly, and replaced it on the table, not wishing to appear interested in it. 'My aunt could tell you numbers of stories about that

girl.' Ernestine went on :—'She had such a sad history. She must have been lovely.'

'Ah! indeed! then I shall see you at the hospital to-morrow, Miss Franklin? Twelve o'clock, remember, and give my name.'

'I sha'n't fail to come—thanks very much for your kindness. Good evening.' She was too much accustomed to study faces and expressions in her professional capacity not to have noticed the change which had come over her visitor since he had looked at Lizzie de Brousa's picture, and, woman-like, she began at once to weave a little romance round him, and conjecture what could have been the cause of his abstraction.

It was a lovely light evening, and Bruce, on leaving the house, decided to walk home. Pembroke Road was in Kensington and his own lodging was in Bayswater, so he had not so very far to walk—he wanted to have a little time to think before he got home to study; he had a headache, too, and the cool summer air did him good. It was a curious coincidence, his having come across a person who had his own mother's picture in her room, and who, her niece said, 'knew countless stories about her.' He was longing to hear them, and felt quite impatient for Mrs Clark's recovery that he might ply her with questions about his own past, for it was a closed book to himself, and he could scarcely recall his own early childhood at all. He had seen his father com-

paratively recently, but Mr Jefferies, senior, was a silent, morose, reserved man, and Bruce had no happy associations with his parent's name. When he was still a boy, his father had come over to England, periodically, to see that the money he was spending on his son's education was being made good use of; but since he was twenty Bruce had had to make his own way and settle his own fate for himself. Mr Jefferies had written to him on his twentieth birthday, informing him that owing to his profession and press of work it would be impossible for him to revisit England for some years, but that he would always see that a balance remained at his banker's sufficient to allow his son £200 a-year; and the letter ended with a hope that some gentlemanly and profitable profession would soon provide Bruce with a larger income, and, above all, that he would form no imprudent connections, or hamper himself in any foolish way by his affections.

This was the last communication Bruce had received from the father, who was little better than a legal guardian to him, and whom he found it impossible to love. Seven years had now passed, and, but for the allowance which continued to arrive in regular remittances from Australia to Messrs G. & C.'s bank, Bruce would never have known whether he had still a parent or not. His was fortunately a quiet, trustful, equable temperament, and never hav-

ing known a mother's love or received the early impressions which, with most of us, usually mould our after-lives either for good or for evil, he did not miss them, and had developed rather in spite of, instead of trained by, circumstances. He had no reason to be cynical, for every one had been very kind to him all his life ; he had had first one home, then another, and he had always felt very grateful to those who had given him pleasure. His was a simple nature satisfied with the blessings that were already his, and accepting each new phase of life as a fresh opportunity for the development of those qualities which he thought should characterise every true man. It will not be supposed that he was what would be considered an orthodox type of Englishman ; he had lived with too many diverse people to have fallen into any groove whatever—it had always seemed to him quite natural to believe in God, and the New Testament story affected him greatly, but he had no sympathy with any sect, and used to say when asked his religion, that he hoped he was a member of the Christian Church, and, like the venerable Maurice, when pressed by aggressive theologians for a definition of his views, would simply repeat the Apostles' Creed, and generally refuse to argue further.

He had early developed a taste for medical science, and was at the time I am now writing on the eve of taking out his diploma as licen-

tiate of the College of Surgeons. He was thought very highly of by the hospital authorities, and Dr Bury, who has already been mentioned in these pages, saw in him the promise of a very rising man.

His acquaintance with the Rosses had become a very bright element in his life. He used to say, 'the Rosses' to himself at first, when thinking of them, but by degrees the mother dropped into the background, and 'Dorothy Ross' was the prominent figure, whenever he pictured to himself the little room upstairs above his own, where he spent so many happy evenings, and which he used to designate his 'paradise.'

As he neared home on this particular evening he began almost involuntarily to wonder how Miss Ross and Miss Franklin would get on together, and whether there was a chance of their ever meeting, and so on. He should like Miss Ross's opinion of Ernestine, and resolved, if he became better acquainted with Mrs Clark, to try and manage somehow that the two girls should meet.

CHAPTER IV.

LADY ROSS'S BALL.

'I WISH Dudley were here for to-night, Janet.'

'I don't.'

Why not?'

'Oh, I don't know, excepting that I always enjoy myself more when he is not watching me and criticising my partners.

'I wonder if that crotchety old Aunt Anne will let Dolly come to-night, and what dress she will wear if she does come?'

'She wasn't badly dressed the other night, Constance, was she? She is a funny little thing. I can't make her out. How Dudley would hate her, wouldn't he?'

'I don't know why he should, Janet; she is very ladylike, though she is unlike most of the girls we know. I wonder Aunt Anne lets her be so eccentric, and go about London alone in the way she does. Who can we introduce to her to-night? We must think over all our good-natured partners, for I don't suppose she can dance one little bit.

'No, poor girl, I am afraid she will find it dull work doing wall-flower. Old Dr Bury promised to look in; perhaps he will take compassion on her. We must fly and dress, though, Connie. Mamma will be sending for us directly.'

Janet and Constance Ross rushed upstairs to prepare for their ball, which was to take place that evening.

At ten o'clock the room presented truly a most inviting appearance. The musicians were seated at the piano sorting their music, and Janet and Constance Ross were flitting about the room putting a last touch here and there to the floral decorations, which, as is usual in London ball-rooms, were profuse.

At last the door bell rang, and one after another of the guests arrived. Lady Ross, resplendent in ruby satin and diamonds, took up her position at the drawing-room door, and in a very short time the room was full, though a London *habitué* would probably have stuck his eye-glass in his eye, stroked his moustache, and drawled out, 'No one here yet, quite a desert!' for unless a ball-room is so crowded that dancing is not only impossible, but a positive torture as well, it is considered fashionable to call it 'quite empty!'

About eleven o'clock a hansom drove up to No. — Eaton Square, with a portmanteau and bag on the top. A young man, attired in a light ulster and soft felt hat, jumped out, rang

the bell, and muttered to himself, 'An "at home," or some such fashionable tomfoolery going on, I suppose—wish I had gone to an hotel;' and then, as the door was opened by a pompous, white-haired butler, he exclaimed, 'Well, Barnes, here I am; what's up?'

'A ball, Sir Dudley. Shall I tell her ladyship you have arrived, or will you dress first?' answered the old man.

'Good gracious, must I go and dress! and I am dead tired and starving; but look here, I must get out of this, for I don't want to be caught as I am. I'll go up the back stairs, Barnes; send Thomas up with some hot water and my things, and I'll be down in half-an-hour. Don't say I have come. I will surprise them.'

'Yes, Sir Dudley,' and Barnes waddled off to despatch a footman to look after his young master.

In a little more than twenty minutes Dudley was dressed, and going down the back stairs again, he re-entered the hall and went up the front stairs as a newly-arrived guest. He was close up to his mother before she saw him, being short-sighted, and she was on the point of shaking hands with him as a stranger.

'My dear Dudley!' she exclaimed, 'how you startled me. When did you arrive, and why did you not tell us to expect you?'

'I did telegraph this morning, mother. How was it you did not get it? I have had a beastly journey; delayed three hours or more between

Paris and Amiens by a goods train breaking down in front of us. I nearly went to bed instead of dressing, but the music sounded too inviting, and I shall be able to help you now. Who are here—the usual people, I suppose?'

'Oh, yes, of course. You know them nearly all. Your sisters will be glad to see you. Connie was wishing for you so much.'

'Good child,—was she? I must go and find her. Where is Janet? But I say, mother, who is that pretty little thing just gone by, waltzing with Heathcote, dressed in white and gold?'

'That one with the fluffy red hair and the gold bands round her head, do you mean? That's little Dolly Ross—*your* child.'

'No! is it? By Jove she's awfully pretty! What could Janet mean by writing to tell me she was a little dowdy with red hair and no style. She beats both my sisters hollow. I must go and introduce myself.'

'If you can catch her,' replied his mother; 'but I really don't know what has come over the men to-night. They are all bewitched, and I have been perfectly besieged for introductions to her. She's quite the attraction to-night apparently, and it will turn her head, I am afraid.' And as if to verify her words young Lord Do-no-more came up to Lady Ross at that moment and begged to be introduced to the 'young lady in white and gold

now dancing with Captain Heathcote;' and his hostess, rather against her will, was obliged to rustle across the room during the interval of the dances and take him up to Dolly. But her card was full all but two dances, and those, unfortunately, he was engaged for, so he had to retreat and remain satisfied with the very bright sweet, half-regretful smile she gave him.

'So! my little cousin,' thought Dudley as he observed this little incident, 'you are a little witch are you? I must try my luck now and secure one of those spare dances at least.' And Dolly pausing on her partner's arm just then to speak to her aunt, he took the opportunity of saying to her, 'You don't remember me, Dolly, do you?'

Dolly started and looked at him in amazement. Who was this young man who called her by her Christian name, and whom she did not at the same time recollect having seen before?

'I am your cousin Dudley,' he continued, amused at her puzzled expression, and not over-pleased at seeing one of slight vexation and embarrassment come over her face instead.

'Oh, indeed!' she replied rather stiffly. 'I don't think we have met before, have we?'

'Yes, years ago; give me one of those dances Lord Do-no-more couldn't have, and we will renew our acquaintance.'

Dolly would gladly have got out of dancing

with her cousin. She did not take a fancy to his face, and he had been watching her evidently, which she hated. But she thought she ought to be polite to him in his own house, so hastily scribbling down his name for No. 20, she took her partner's arm again and was lost in another minute in the maze of whirling figures, and Dudley was forgotten in the ecstasies of valsing to the strains of 'Dreamland,' with a man whom Dolly called 'a heavenly dancer.'

His dance secured, Dudley went in search of his sisters, and found Janet down in the tea-room eating an ice. Her partner handed her over to her brother as soon as he appeared, and the two sat out the next dance together talking over all that had taken place since they had last met. Presently an elderly man sauntered into the room as if in search of some one, and Janet exclaimed, 'There's Dr Bury, and I meant to have introduced him to Dolly. Poor child, I expect she is tired of being a wall-flower, and would like some supper. I know the good old doctor will look after her.'

'My dear Janet,' answered Dudley, rather amused at the idea of the little white and gold figure ornamenting the walls of the ball-room, 'you may spare yourself the trouble, for I assure you Dolly is more than engaged for the whole evening. I could hardly get a dance myself just now.'

'Nonsense, you are joking, Dudley,' replied his sister, incredulous of Dolly's success; 'have

you spoken to her already? I was right in my description of her, wasn't I?'

'Far from it; I can't think what you meant by saying she was dowdy, and had no style. She is awfully pretty, and has a most unusual amount of style.'

Janet lifted her eyebrows, and shrugged her shoulders in utter amazement. What would come next? Dudley admiring Dolly! She never heard of such a thing; but she thought it wiser not to contradict him, so she remarked drily,—

'Ah, you have not seen her by daylight. She certainly does look tolerably well to-night, and not so peculiar as she generally does.'

Just then the object of their remarks came in, to Janet's surprise, on Dr Bury's arm, and was apparently on very good terms with him, for they were laughing and talking in a most animated way.

'Pretty well for a *beginner*, eh, Dudley?' said Janet, with a sneer.

'Poor child, why shouldn't she be frank and natural; it does one good to hear her merry laugh and see such a fresh, unmade-up face.'

'Here's my partner,' interrupted his sister shortly, and left him sitting where he was.

'Amiable Janet!' thought Dudley, when left to himself; 'jealous, like the rest of your sex; and well you may be of your cousin, for she has the pull over you in most things, as far as the eye can judge.'

When No. 20 came, Dudley took up his position at the door, watching for Dolly to appear, and in a few minutes he spied the little golden head coming up the stairs, and rushed to claim her. Dolly would have been glad to escape dancing with her cousin, for she had taken an unaccountable dislike to him, and felt sure he would patronise her; but of course there was nothing for it but to take his arm when he was standing there before her, saying politely, 'Our dance, I think, and make the best of it.' Unfortunately, Dudley was not a good dancer. He was too self-satisfied to learn, and had an idea that waltzing was only hopping about to any tune which was in three-time. So poor Dolly, with her graceful gliding step and perfect ear, was in torture with him, getting her toes trodden on, her dress torn, and her whole self bumped about in a dreadful way. She really could not stand more than three turns of it, and gasping out she was hot and tired, she made him stop and take her out on to the balcony, where they sat down, and she had time to get cool and smooth out her poor mangled dress. Dudley was glad to have this opportunity of talking, and took it rather as a compliment, that she preferred his conversation to his dancing; he wanted to draw her out very much, and began,—

'So you are not too much of a blue-stocking to care about dancing, Dolly?'

'Who told you I was?' replied she, still out

of breath, and wishing he would not talk to her till she was calmer.

'Oh, a little bird whispered it to me, and I expected to find you sitting in one of the stiffest-backed arm-chairs, with spectacles on, and dressed in an æsthetically hideous gown, talking to some old fogie of a professor.'

'Dudley! how can you make me believe such nonsense? Poor little stupid me! I should like to see the professor who would care to talk to me,' answered Dolly; then added quickly, 'I know Janet and Constance told you about me; they think me very odd.'

'Why?'

'Because I am not their "style," I suppose, and go about alone without a maid, and am generally independent. Are *you* shocked too, Dudley?'

He looked amused, and replied, 'I suppose I ought to be, but somehow you don't give me the impression of a nineteenth century young woman, and I can hardly believe that you are anything more than a child whom it is everybody's bounden duty to protect.'

Such a speech was not calculated to make Dolly regard her cousin with additional favour, and so indignant was she at the patronising tone in which it was made, that she drew her little figure up to its full height, and said, with as much dignity as she could, 'Thank you, cousin Dudley, but I think even some children can protect themselves,' and then getting up from her

seat, she added, in a different tone, 'I should like to go and sit in the drawing-room, please, so as to be on the spot when the next dance begins.'

Dudley gave her his arm, not noticing at all that he had vexed her, for conceited men are not sensitive or quick to see when they have said a wrong thing. He prided himself on his tact and knowledge of human nature, and was always condemning others for blundering and wounding the susceptibilities of their fellow-creatures, so he merely said, as they crossed the room, 'I am here now to protect you, and shall come and see you very soon. Where do you live? I forget.'

'Oh, you would never condescend to look at us in our little house,' Dolly answered sarcastically. 'Pray don't trouble to come so far. I am out all day and busy all the evening, besides, I don't really think we have got enough chairs to accommodate visitors, and I am sure you would not like to stand.'

'Silly child,' returned Dudley, not a bit nonplussed, 'of course I shall come to see you and Aunt Anne. My mother found a seat when she went, so I suppose, unless you have burnt all your chairs since that, I shall not have any difficulty either. Here is your partner; don't dance too much, or you will lose your pretty roses,' and with these words he yielded her to her partner, and she was thankful to get rid of him.

'How I wish he had never come,' she thought, as she floated this time calmly round the room, mentally comparing this partner to her last, not to the advantage of the latter.

But all pleasant things must have an end, and Lady Ross's ball was no exception to this rule. The dancing was kept up with great spirit until half-past two, when some of the most fashionable guests began to take their departure ; and Janet came up to Dolly with an unwelcome message from her mother to say that Lady Brown-Jones had most kindly offered to take her home as she lived in that part of town, so with many regrets, Miss Dorothy Ross was hurried out after old Lady Jones into the big landau, and carried away, like Cinderella, to her dingy home, leaving behind her the brilliantly-lighted room, the pretty dresses, inspiriting music, and, above all, the charming partners who, after all, had contributed most towards her intense enjoyment of the evening.

The old lady fell fast asleep before they had gone half-a-mile, and Dolly was left to think over it all and live in a dream of bliss, until at last the carriage stopped opposite the little brown door, the footman sprang down and pealed the cracked old bell, and Dolly found herself in a fix. Here was home, and she ought to get out and say good night, and thank her kind friend for bringing her ; but Lady Brown-Jones continued to snore, and might be

very vexed if she were roused from her first sleep. Dolly thought she would ask the servant to open the carriage door very loudly, but then feared that would be rude, so she tried putting up the window and letting it down with a bang, hoping the noise would wake the old lady, and much relieved was she at the success of this device.

Lady Jones started up and said,—

'Here we are, my dear Miss Ross. I am afraid you are very tired. Good night, good night. Home, John.'

Dolly flew out of the carriage, and the door had shut again behind her before she perceived who it was standing before her, candle in hand.

'Mr Jefferies!' she exclaimed. 'You haven't been sitting up for me, I hope?'

'Would that be such a very awful crime?' he asked. 'The fact is this. I went up to see your mother this evening, and found her in great difficulties. The maid had gone to bed with a bilious headache, the landlady is out, and Mrs Ross did not know whom to ask to let you in, so I told her I should in all probability be up in any case, studying, and should be very happy, proud, in fact, to act door-keeper, and see the chain and lock properly fastened after you. It was an immense relief to your mother, I could see—'

'And immensely kind of you, Mr Jefferies. I am quite ashamed of myself for being so late

and keeping you up all this time. I am sure you must be dead tired.'

'I! Oh, dear, no. You know I am accusomed to sitting up. You must be tired, I should think, though. I must not keep you now. You look as fresh as if you were just starting, all the same!' and his glance was unmistakably an admiring one, as it rested on her.

'I am not a bit tired, and I danced every single dance. I *did* enjoy it so much. Every one was so jolly and kind to me, and such a nice old lady brought me home. But I suppose I mustn't stay talking, or mamma will come popping out to see what has happened to me, for I am certain she heard the bell ring. I thought directly the man gave such a peal that it would wake her. Good night, Mr Jefferies, and thank you very, very much for being so good as to wait up for me.'

She took his hand for an instant, and then turned to go up to bed. Bruce never forgot that vision of her standing on the first stair, her candle in one hand throwing a light on the sweet face, half enveloped in a light scarf which she had put over her head, her shawl falling off her shoulders, revealing the pretty curves of her throat and neck, and one soft, white, round arm peeping out below, holding her dress up in her hand.

'She danced every dance, and every one was kind to her! I should think so! Who could

help being so to such a bright, sweet little thing?' Bruce sighed to himself as he withdrew to his room, 'Only a month more, and then I shall have left here, and I suppose all chance of our meeting again is at an end.'

CHAPTER V.

A CONQUEST IN TWO SENSES OF THE WORD.

BREAKFAST in the Rosses room next morning was kept on the table longer than usual, for Dolly was treating her mother to a full and detailed account of her ball, and chattering with the volubility of eighteen years, regardless of time or of the meal before her.

'And Dudley arrived suddenly, mamma,' she was saying; 'they were all so astonished, and I don't think Janet was over-pleased. I don't like him, and I should think he was rather a tiresome sort of brother.'

'Why, Dolly, didn't he dance with you?'

'Oh, yes, mamma; I felt quite flattered in fact, because he came up and introduced himself to me directly, but—I can't say quite what it is, but—*I wish he hadn't come.* He is so ugly too, mamma; his hair is red, redder than mine a great deal, and his complexion is pasty, and his eyes a sort of greenish-grey, and oh, he *is* so patronising.'

'Ah, indeed; well, my dear, I suppose you must expect that. You see he considers himself your benefactor, and you really are indebted to him for your education, so you must not be surprised if he looks upon you rather as his ward. Whom else did you dance with, Dolly?'

'Oh, a lot of boys, and one or two rather jolly young men. But I did laugh so at some of them, they put on such airs and graces, and it seemed their one ambition to impress upon one thoroughly that dancing bored them utterly, and that they only did it out of kindness to us poor girls. I think I was too sprightly for most of them, and astonished them by my energy. One man said to me with almost a sneer, "You don't live in London, I presume?" and when I asked him why he should say so, he replied with *this* sort of drawl, "Oh, you are so awfully energetic—that's all,"' and Dolly mimicked his tone and voice exactly.

The door opened just then, and Dudley Ross walked in. Mrs Ross jumped up in dismay at being caught unawares in her morning gown and cap, and her feelings were so visible in her face, that Dudley hastened to apologise and to explain the reason of so early a visit.

'My dear aunt,' he said, 'I feel quite ashamed of intruding upon you at this hour, but my mother wanted this note sent to you, and I said I would be the bearer, that I might take back the answer, and see for myself,' he

added, turning to Dolly, 'how *you* look this morning after your dissipation.'

'Oh, thank you, Dudley,' replied Dolly, while her mother opened the note from Lady Ross. 'I am all right, not a bit tired now, only very lazy, as you see by my being at breakfast so late. How are Aunt Laura and my cousins? Very tired, I am afraid, after all their exertions. It was a splendid success though, wasn't it? I was just telling mamma about the decorations. I never saw anything more lovely.'

'Pretty fair, on the whole, they were,' he replied, carelessly; 'but I didn't think much of the people they had collected. I don't know how they got hold of some of them.'

'Yes, Dolly thought some of them were very queer,' chimed in Mrs Ross; 'she was talking off one young man just as you came in, Dudley.'

'Mamma!' exclaimed poor Dolly, blushing furiously, 'I only did it for fun, indeed I did not think them *queer*, but the ones that amused me were those who seemed so excessively bored at everything.'

'Oh, exactly,' said Dudley, in a dry tone; 'I should scarcely have imagined that your ideas and mine of society would have coincided, and I should not have thought you could have had experience enough to know what I meant by a queer collection of people for *my mother's* drawing-room.'

A rude speech, and a characteristic one—for Dudley's peculiarity was fondness for abusing his own home, and his extreme sensitiveness to the abuse of it by any other person. What he liked was to run a thing down, and be contradicted, and have it praised up to the skies. He could not bear to hear his own opinion confirmed, and his fault-finding justified. The fact being that, generally speaking, it was only out of pure perversity of mind that he found fault at all, in order that he might draw forth a contrary opinion, and force praise that would not otherwise have been expressed. So he was really vexed when his aunt told him that Dolly, that young, insignificant little cousin of his, who had scarcely ever seen so large a concourse of people before in a drawing-room, should venture to criticise and disparage the chosen guest of his mother and sisters. The pretty blushing little face before him, with its genuine expression of distress at the unkind speech he had made, softened even his hard, selfish heart, and he mollified himself by thinking, 'Well, she is only a child, and must be treated as such; and I need not feel as vexed as if she had been an older woman, and knew more of the world,' and patting her on the shoulder he said, with a magnanimous air,—

'Ah, well, my dear child, you have not seen the world yet. You will soon learn more of its ways, and see that every one cannot be as *ingénue* and simple as yourself!'—then, by way

of changing the subject, he said to Mrs Ross, —'And what is your answers to my mother's note, aunt?'

'Dolly must speak for herself,' she replied. 'Look, my dear, read this note. Your aunt kindly wants us to dine with her to-night. Dudley is to take you and his sisters to the theatre afterwards, while I keep your aunt company. Sha'n't you be too tired to go out again?'

Dudley and his two sisters all the evening! The idea was distasteful to Dolly; but then the thought flashed across her, that probably they would all be too much taken up with watching the play to talk, and the temptation of having her desire to go to the theatre gratified was too strong for her, and she replied,—

'Oh, no, mamma, I shall be quite fresh this evening, and perfectly able to sit up again till two a.m., if necessary. How kind of Aunt Laura to think of it. You know, I haven't been to a theatre since Uncle Aleck took me to the pantomime, eight years ago!'

Dudley laughed.

'This is quite refreshing, Dolly,' he said. 'Everything is new to you, and you are prepared to find a London season an enjoyable thing. My sisters will be delighted to have so un-*blasée* a companion to-night. It is a very good piece, I hear, and well acted, so you ought to enjoy it as much as, no doubt, you did the pantomime. I wont intrude upon you

any longer though, now that I have got a satisfactory answer. Dinner at half-past six, remember; and mind you are punctual, for we must leave the house at half-past seven. Good-bye, aunt, or rather, *au revoir*,' and nodding to Dolly, took up his hat, and left the room.

Dolly shut the door after him, and throwing herself into an arm-chair, exclaimed,—

'Oh, what a prig!'

'My dear Dolly, how can you use such an expression?' remarked her mother, reprovingly. 'I am sure your cousin is a most amiable, charming young man, and he—'

'Is an undeniable prig, mamma,' repeated the incorrigible Dolly, 'and the way he treats me is unbearable.'

'You are so very bumptious, my dear,' rejoined Mrs Ross, 'that you are constantly feeling yourself snubbed, as you call it—though how you can say your cousin snubs you, I can't imagine. I think he is most kind and condescending to you.'

'Exactly. Just what I hate, kind and condescending people. They rub me up, and make me feel inclined to be awfully rude. Why should Dudley always treat me as a baby, mamma? I don't call that kind or considerate.'

'Well, you are but a child to him,' argued Mrs Ross, 'and you have still to learn, Dorothy, that you are not immaculate or infallible, and if you adopted a more humble attitude of mind

with your elders and superiors, it would be more becoming to one of your years and experience.'

'To order myself lowly and reverently to all my betters, mamma, is that it? But unfortunately you say I am so conceited that I don't think any one is my "better," so what am I to do? *I* know whom I feel to be my superiors, and them I respect, and am most deferential to. Mr Jefferies, for instance. He is miles and miles my better, and Dudley's better, and most people's better, I think, and I am sure you cannot say I am bumptious with him.'

Dolly was in an argumentative, perverse frame of mind, and Mrs Ross would have been wiser had she refrained from continuing the discussion, but she could not resist the opportunity of saying something disparaging of Bruce, and answered sharply,—

'Indeed, I wish you were not quite so meek with him, Dolly. You allow him far too much liberty, and I should be very glad if you would reverse your behaviour to him, and treat him more as you do Dudley. I can't see myself wherein the great superiority over us all lies in Mr Jefferies.'

'*Mamma!*' cried Dolly, emphasising her first word, 'how could I ever forget to be very, very grateful to Mr Jefferies for his great kindness to me? giving me so much of his valuable time, when every hour's study to him is precious. He never minds how we treat

him, and he is just as friendly and good though we behave to him exactly as if he were a paid master, and have never even asked him to tea when he comes in the evening to teach me Latin. I often wonder he cares to keep friends with such ungracious, inhospitable people as we are.'

'Dolly, Dolly, remember whom you are speaking to, if you please,' retorted her mother, severely. 'I assure you *I* feel myself under no obligation to Mr Jefferies, for I have often begged him to discontinue your lessons if he finds them wearisome or in any way inconvenient, and my opinion, which I have long held, is now confirmed by all that you say, and I see plainly that he has a very bad influence over you, and I shall take care that the intimacy between you ceases from to-day. Go and fetch me my bonnet and out-door things, please. I shall go out for half-an-hour, and I trust by the time I come in you will be in a pleasanter frame of mind.'

Dolly got up without a word and bringing her mother's things down she dressed her and saw her out of the door, then flying upstairs to her own little room she flung herself down on her knees by the bed and sobbed as if her heart would break. Poor little thing, her warm championship of Mr Jefferies had only accomplished the very opposite effect to what she desired; and now the happy, delightful lessons were to be given up, and her kind

friend and teacher would be lost to her. She did not know until that moment how much she would have to give up, and what a very large blank would be left in her life when Bruce Jefferies had been taken out of it. She knew he would be going away soon, and that in the natural course of events their lessons must come to an end, and their intimacy cease; but that was different somehow. He had put off thinking about it until the time came, and hoped somewhere, deep down in her sanguine sunshine-loving heart, that the separation might after all not be so great a one, and that wherever Mr Jefferies lived when he began his practice, he would be able to come and see them from time to time, and the mutual interest in each other's lives be sustained. But now, Dolly could not bear to think of his feelings being hurt, as inevitably they would be if her mother carried out her threat of giving him his *congé*.

She literally shivered when she pictured to herself the scene likely to take place. Bruce coming smiling into the room and looking so good and noble and manly, and Mrs Ross with her grimmest, coldest smile on her face, her lips ready to utter the ungracious words, while she, herself, she could not imagine where she should sit or stand or exist in the room, and thought she should bury her face in the sofa cushion and look as much ashamed of the whole proceedings as she could until her mother had

said her say, when she could look up and see him with an expression of pain and wounded feelings written on every line of his face, and hear his calm clear voice say quietly, 'Good-bye.'

Her brain was in a highly excited state, and she allowed her imagination to carry her away, for of course Mrs Ross had not intended that anything so dramatic as this scene that Dolly was imagining should take place. She was genuinely displeased with her daughter for giving expression to her feelings so unreservedly, and more especially as it confirmed her suspicions that Bruce was becoming a great deal too necessary to her happiness. She was, in fact, frightened at the discovery that Dolly cared so much for his friendship, and thought it was time she was checked and an attachment nipped in the bud, which, if formed, would be an undesirable one for a daughter of Theodore Ross, heir to a baronetcy and H.B.M. Consul.

Her complacent reflections during her short walk would have been considerably disturbed had she known all that was passing in Dolly's mind, and how that her words, which she had calculated, would have so desirable an effect on her child were only strengthening her dawning love for Bruce Jefferies, and tying with the infallible thread of opposition, the knot which might otherwise have remained untied altogether, or at anyrate but loosely tied.

When will parents learn that the old longing for forbidden fruit is as strong in every one of their daughters as it was in Madame Eve? Whether we are lineally descended from that lady or not, and whether the whole story was a fiction or not, I am not prepared to say, but this, I know, that the chronicler of the history of Eve was one who had studied female character, for, in handing down the story of her determination to possess that which was forbidden her, he has only portrayed the chief characteristic of every true woman. Put any woman now into a garden of Eden, and, given a fascinating tempter and sufficiently attractive temptation, who would not foretell the same result as that which took place in the Biblical narrative? Especially if the 'Adam' in the case were equally weak and incapable of guiding his wife as our great progenitor was.

Dolly was scarcely within the garden of Eden yet though, and her forbidden fruit had hardly began to dangle before her eyes. She had just caught sight of it, and that first glimpse had made her long to get nearer to it and see whether it was worth sighing for. She lay on her bed a long time thinking about it, until at last her thoughts wandered off, her eyes closed, and she fell into a sound sleep, from which she would never have awoke till next morning, had not Mrs Ross, wondering what had become of her, gone up to her daughter's room about half-past four, with the full intention of

continuing her lecture, and of supervising Dolly's dress for the evening.

When she entered the room, however, and saw her sleeping child, her mother's heart was touched, and she crept softly up to the bed with a different expression on her face. The light fluffy, golden hair, was a little dishevelled from lying down, the tears still wetted the eyelashes, and the lips, slightly parted, had a tragic curve about them which made Mrs Ross look lovingly at the usually bright face, and caused her to whisper, 'Poor child, have I said too much?' She bent down and kissed the forehead, which was still so free from lines, and murmured her child's name. Dolly's eyes opened, and she looked positively frightened at seeing her mother standing over her.

'Mamma!' she exclaimed, 'what is the matter?'

'Nothing, dear, only it is nearly five, and you will have no time to dress if you are not quick. I came to see what had become of you. You have had three hours' sleep.'

Dolly sprang up and blinked her eyes, and tried to wake herself thoroughly, then, catching sight of herself in the glass, she laughed heartily. 'Dear me, what a dissipated appearance I have got! how ridiculous of me to fall asleep like that. Thank you, mamma dear, for waking me in time. Dudley would be vexed if we were late for dinner, after all his injunctions.'

By the time the clock struck six, however, Mrs and Miss Ross were in the big drawing-room in Eaton Square waiting for her ladyship to come down to receive them, and were much relieved to find that their cab horse, which had threatened to walk the whole way across the Park, had not made them late after all.

Janet and Constance put in their appearance very late. They had been in the Park with some friends, and had waited to see the Princess, so were not home till the gong had sounded for dinner. Dudley was very cross with them, and argued with his mother about keeping dinner hot for them, and perversely insisted on leaving the table at least five minutes before it was necessary, on purpose to hurry his sisters.

Dolly could not feel thankful enough she had not been a similar offender, and was quite sorry for her cousins. They took it all very coolly, and indulged in abuse of Dudley when they arrived at the theatre and found themselves let in for more than half of the first piece, which happened to be a particularly foolish and dull one. The play they had come to see was a very good one, however, and after the first act they were all in a better humour.

Dolly was in raptures. She had never seen any good acting, and she delighted in it. Dudley was pleased to see her so genuinely enjoying it, and it was a treat to him to see any girl so fresh and naïve, and ready to acknowledge herself pleased.

'Well, Dolly, and what do you think of it?' he asked after the second act.

'Oh, Dudley, it's *too* splendid! Miss Franklin is simply glorious, isn't she?' replied Dolly, her eyes all alight with enthusiasm.

'Yes, she's not bad in this. She's a clever girl, and I thought this part would suit her, and I told her so.'

'Told her so! Do you know her, Dudley?' asked Dolly, with unfeigned astonishment.

'Oh, yes, I know her very well.'

'Can't you introduce me to her, Dudley? *Do*,' pleaded his little cousin; 'I should like to know her so much.'

'My dear Dorothy,' interrupted Janet in a cold tone, 'what are you thinking of. Know Miss Franklin—*an actress!* How could you?'

'Dolly is young, Janet,' replied her brother, 'and does not know much about these things. Of course, you could not be introduced to her, for you would, in the first place, have to go behind the scenes, and, in the second, I don't know what object there would be in your obtaining an introduction. Actresses, Dolly, are of a different class altogether from yourself, and no gentleman would ever think of introducing any of his female relatives or friends to a professional on the stage.'

'But why, Dudley?' argued Dolly.

Dudley shrugged his shoulders, and said, 'I can't explain things to you, my dear child. You will have to learn as you grow

older that all that glitters is not gold, and, moreover, that all the gold that glitters for us men does not glitter equally for women. It is one thing for me to know Ernestine Franklin, and quite another for you to do the same. In the same way, one piece I might choose to go and see acted which you could not possibly be taken to. Life is quite different for girls and men, Dolly.'

'But, Dudley,' persisted she, 'if it would injure me to know Miss Franklin, it is very hard on the other girls who act with her to be obliged to associate with her. I suppose they are not all so wicked as she is; and as for plays, which you say are improper for women to see, why don't men prevent women from *acting* in them as well? What is the difference between letting your lady friend see such things, and allowing other ladies act them?'

Dudley threw back his head and laughed heartily.

'My dear little Donna Quixote!' he said; 'where did you pick up such notions? One would think you came from the backwoods of Australia, to hear you talk. It is positively refreshing to meet with such innocence as yours!'

'Yes,' chimed in Janet; 'and yet to hear you lay down the law, Dolly, one would think rather that you were Dudley's spiritual adviser, you seem so very decided on such matters, for your age and experience.'

'Oh, don't quarrel, you two,' interrupted Constance, who was sorry to see Dolly snubbed. The third act is just going to begin, so do pay attention, and drop your argument.'

Dolly's face was very red, and her eyes looked suspiciously watery. She hated to be thought dictational, and Janet's harsh speech had made her feel ashamed of her enthusiastic argument. She was very absent for the rest of the evening, and scarcely spoke another word. Dudley was vexed at having hurt her feelings, and wished to make it up with her before they parted; so, when the Ross's carriage drove up to the door of the theatre, he hurried his sisters in, and said,—

'I shall take Dolly home; she can't go in a cab by herself,' and, accordingly, bidding Dolly wrap a shawl well round her, he put her into a hansom and jumped in after her.'

'Well,' he said, cheerily, as soon as they had got clear of the crowd of carriages, and were trotting along on the quieter wood-paved Piccadilly, 'what did you think of it after all?'

'Oh, thank you, Dudley, I have enjoyed myself very much indeed this evening, and it was very kind of you to take me. I am sorry you should have come so far out of your way now, though I could quite well have gone home alone.'

Dolly said all this stiffly, and there was no brightness in her tone as there had been when she was arguing in the theatre.

'Nonsense, it is no trouble,' he answered brusquely, and set to work wondering how he could make her bright and talkative again, and friendly with him. 'I am sorry Janet was so rude to you,' he began at last.'

'Not at all,' interrupted Dolly quickly, unwilling to re-open the subject. 'She was not rude, and I am sorry I said as much as I did. Please do not begin the discussion again.'

Dudley gave it up as hopeless after that, and waited till the lodgings were reached before he spoke again. Then, before opening the doors of the cab and handing her out, he turned towards her and said, 'Now, Dolly, let's make it up, give me a kiss, and say you are sorry for talking such nonsense as you did about actresses.'

But he did not know what she was made of, and he had just touched the wrong chord in her by such a speech. Had he said instead, 'Say you forgive me for setting you down?' or, 'Don't let us quarrel about such a trifle,' she would readily enough have made friends, but as for asking *his* forgiveness for having only said what she thought! Dolly could not do it, and was, moreover, so angry at the bare supposition, that she jumped out of the cab as quick as thought, and rang the bell loudly, hoping to escape into the house before her cousin could follow her.

He was in a great rage at her cool treatment of him, and was determined to conquer her

sooner or later, so descending leisurely from the cab, he paid the fare, and without saying a word went and stood by Dolly waiting for the door to be opened. When they got inside the hall he told the maid she might go, and standing across the passage, so that Dolly could not pass him, he said quietly,—

'Now, don't be a silly child, kiss me and let me go home.'

'You can go home now,' she replied coldly, 'but I am not going to be ordered about like that, cousin Dudley. If you choose to be rude you can kiss me, because you are a man, and can do anything you like, I suppose; but as for saying I am sorry, it would be untrue if I did, for I am *not*.'

He could not help admiring her as she stood there before him, her figure drawn up to its full height, and her whole bearing expressive of injured pride and dignity, and he felt inclined to keep up the situation on purpose to have the satisfaction of watching this new phase of her character. How long they would have remained there can never be ascertained, as the dining-room door suddenly opened and Bruce Jefferies came out, candle in hand.

'I beg your pardon!' he exclaimed, and hastily drew back.

But Dolly's attitude rapidly changed, she turned round quickly when he appeared, and all her stiffness and anger vanished, and she was frank and charming as ever again.

'Pray, don't apologise, Mr Jefferies,' she said, 'we have just come in from the theatre. Allow me to introduce my cousin, Sir Dudley Ross. Dudley, Mr Jefferies, our fellow-lodger.'

The two men looked at each other. Bruce bowed, and Dudley acknowledged it with the very slightest possible inclination of his head, and the words plainly written on his face, 'Who the —— are you?'

Dolly was much too sharp not to take advantage of such an opportunity as this of getting out of her awkward position, and, holding out her hand to her cousin, she said quietly,—

'Then I will say "Good night," Dudley. Thank you very much for a pleasant evening. I hope your sisters won't be tired.'

And slipping past him she nodded good night to Bruce, ran quickly upstairs, and, shutting her door behind her with a little sharp bang, she threw off her shawl with a gesture of impatience, and ejaculated, 'Thank heaven and Mr Jefferies for deliverance from that horrible Dudley, Hurrah! I have gained the day *this* time. You needn't think "little Dolly" is so easily managed, Sir Dudley. She's not all milk and water and smiles and kisses, as perhaps you are beginning to find out already! Ha! ha!' and Dolly laughed to herself at her little victory over her patronising cousin.

The two, left in the hall by Dolly's disappearance, stood for a minute in awkward silence. Bruce did not half like Sir Dudley's face. He

had caught sight of it first before Dolly had turned round, and the half-insolent, half-admiring expression on it then had displeased him. He could not help noticing, too, the change which had come over it when his cousin said 'Good night' to him, and after she had gone upstairs Sir Dudley had not been able to disguise his vexation.

He brushed past Jefferies, and gruffly murmuring 'Good night,' he banged the door after him, and was evidently in a very bad temper indeed.

'What a bear!' thought Bruce. '*Her* cousin! Good gracious! how different. I believe he was saying something rude to her; she looked quite relieved to see me. Poor little thing, she doesn't seem to have a very jolly time of it on the whole with her relations. Well! I congratulate myself on having so few.'

CHAPTER VI.

MRS ROSS'S GRUEL.

DOLLY did not repeat to her mother anything of the foregoing incident. She felt instinctively that it would be misunderstood, and she knew, moreover, that Mrs Ross would certainly take the side against her and give her another lecture on the impropriety of holding decided views.

For the next few days she lived in dread of Mr Jefferies making his appearance and receiving his *congé*, and as soon as tea was cleared away and the hour drew near in which he was accustomed to pay his evening visit, Dolly grew restless and anxious, and would start and change colour every time the door opened.

A week passed in this way and yet he did not come, so she began to imagine he must have left the house already, and though the thought gave her a pang, it also gave her a certain sense of relief, for, of all things, suspense and watching for some one who never comes is the most trying, especially when the heart is

young and unexperienced, and the woman's nature, self-contained and capable of restraint, has not yet supplanted the impatient impulsiveness of early youth.

One evening it was very close in the Rosses small drawing-room. Dolly went to the window, and proposed that she and her mother should sit outside on the little balcony, which, of course, was very black, but still, more airy than the room, and Mrs Ross agreeing, they moved their chairs out, and Dolly then went upstairs to fetch her work. As she was leaving her room to go down again, her dress caught on a projecting nail and tore a large hole.

'Bother!' she exclaimed, 'I can't mend that now. I must change my dress. How tiresome!'

The first dress that came to her hand was an evening one, and her impulse was to put it aside and look out another, but then she thought, 'It won't signify my wearing this; it will be cooler, too, than my Sunday dress, and I sha'n't wear it out in one evening.'

So she quickly put it on, and, hurriedly twisting a string of beads round her neck, she ran downstairs and opened the drawing-room door, exclaiming, 'Did you think I had gone to bed, mamma?' . . . . . and then stopped suddenly short. A figure stood in the space left by the open window with its back to her, but its outline was unmistakable, and Dolly longed to turn round and rush up to her room.

Mr Jefferies! the very evening when she had not expected him; and here was she, decked out in an evening dress as if she had known he was coming, and had wanted to make herself look particularly nice. Oh! she knew this was what her mother would think, and indeed the look which Mrs Ross gave her as she approached, conveyed such a meaning.

'Good evening, Mr Jefferies. I tore my other dress coming downstairs, mamma; it's awfully hot this evening, isn't it?' Dolly stammered out in a confused sort of way, and then something in Bruce's face made her stop speaking, and she felt instinctively that Mrs Ross had being saying one of her disagreeable speeches to him and had wounded him. He scarcely seemed to notice her. He shook hands mechanically, and then his eyes wandered off and seemed to rest on the chimney pots of the opposite houses. He stood with his back against the window-sill, his whole attitude one of abstraction. There was an awkward pause for some minutes, and then Bruce roused himself as if by an effort, and, turning to Mrs Ross, asked if Miss Ross might give him the treat of a little music.

Thankfully Dolly escaped into the drawing-room and opened the piano, and began mechanically to play some of the 'Lieder and hue Wörte,' which always came most naturally to her fingers when she was pre-occupied with other thoughts. From Mendelssohn she glided

into Schumann, and from Schumann to Beethoven, and the last chord of one of his sonatas reminding her of a similar harmony in Wagner's opera of 'Lohengrin,' she played the Bridal Chorus and Lohengrin's parting song to Elsa.

Bruce never could tell why her playing affected him so deeply, but she always held him entranced during her performances, and soothed him at all times, however unhappy or disturbed he might have felt before her music began. On this occsion he left the window and came and stood by the piano behind her, so that he could see the reflection of her face, as she played, in the mirror which hung over the instrument.

When she had finished she looked up and their eyes met in the glass for one moment, and more was said in that silent glance than in a dozen spoken sentences. But in a London drawing-room it is not in accordance with *les convenances* for young people to gaze at each other in silent rapture, and so trained is the human spirit to the conventionalities of the day, that it rarely transgresses in this respect, especially if the same mirror which reveals a paradise to the lovers in the hidden depths of one another's eyes also reflects the uncompromising and wholly unromantic form of a nineteenth century *mamma*, sitting upright on a sofa, the very incarnation of British propriety and unflinching Mrs Grundy-ism. True, Mrs Ross could not see, from where she was sitting, the very look which Bruce gave Dolly when

she had finished playing, but a long silence is always ominous and disagreeable, morever, to an essentially prosaic person, so she said in her sharpest tone,—

'That will do, Dolly, you need not play any more. Mr Jefferies will excuse you, I am sure, for you ought to go to bed with your bad headache.'

'Yes, Miss Ross,' broke in Mr Jefferies, 'I am so penitent for having kept you so long at the piano. Mrs Ross told me you were suffering to-night, and could not take our last lesson. I hope it has not made your head worse?'

Dolly jumped round on her chair, and said quickly, '*My headache!* mamma,' and then receiving a tremendous frown and a severe glance from her mother, she suddenly took it all in. Mr Jefferies had been told she had a headache as an excuse for her not taking her lesson with him that evening, and it would have been the last!

'How unkind,' thought Dolly. 'Yes, I have certainly a headache now, but perhaps a greater *heart*ache, and that is not likely to be cured by going to bed half-an-hour earlier than usual.'

So she turned to Bruce and said, 'Thank you, playing never does me any harm, and I am only glad you have enjoyed it. Are you going away soon, Mr Jefferies?' and as she asked this question she got up and began putting her music straight, so as to give herself an

excuse for hiding her face, which she knew was a tell-tale one.

'I am going away on Monday,' he replied, shortly.

'Are you going out of London? I suppose we shall never see you now?' was her next speech.

'Oh, no, Miss Ross,' he answered, 'I am not going very far off. Dr Bury, who lives in Chesham Place, is taking me into partnership with him, and I shall live in a little house of my own close by in Wilton Place. But I expect I shall be very much cut off from my old friends, and,' he added in a lower tone, 'I shall miss them greatly, especially my little pupil.'

Dolly's eyes were raised to give him a look of pleasure and gratitude, but they were arrested before meeting his by her mother's face frowning at her from behind his back. So she said brusquely,—

'It is very kind of you to say so, but I am afraid it has been a great bore to you coming up here so often to give me lessons, and, after all, I don't think it has been of much use, for I am so stupid, you see, that you have not been able to teach me much.'

He looked pained and surprised at her tone and speech, and merely said, in answer to it,—

'I am sorry you have so misunderstood me;' and, turning round, held out his hand to say good-bye to Mrs Ross.

Then Dolly gave him her hand mechanically, but no word passed between them, and their eyes did not meet again. In another moment he was gone, and Dolly felt a sort of lump rising in her throat and a strong inclination to cry.

'Foolish little thing!' my readers will say, and they will feel contemptuous of my childish heroine. But does not love make a fool of every one of us sooner or later in our lives, and is there not a saying about the extreme folly of *old* lovers? So remember your own weaknesses, kind friends, and be charitable to Dolly at this early period of her life. She will soon learn the lesson that our cold selfish world teaches us all sooner or later; and a few years hence she will not find it so difficult to turn her soul round with its face to the wall, and show only a smooth, even, expressionless mask instead. And by degrees her eyes will discover the eleventh commandment written on every church door, and every theatrical drop-scene, and on the face of almost every Englishman, 'Love conventionality better than yourself, and yourself better than your neighbour.'

Dolly was buoyed up for the next three days with the hope that as Mr Jefferies did not leave the house till Monday, they might possibly meet again, on the stairs or in the hall, but when Sunday came, and she had not seen him, she began to give it up, and persuade herself that it was best that they had parted as they did,

without further explanations or assertions on either side.

Mrs Ross had a very bad cold and did not go out, so when Dolly came home from church she found all the windows closed and her mother wrapped up in a shawl, grumbling at the weather and her fate and everything, and that afternoon was a trying one for her daughter. She kept up bravely, though, for several hours, and endeavoured to make the time pass pleasantly by offering to read aloud anything her mother liked; but at seven o'clock she felt quite exhausted with the want of air and the high temperature of their sitting-room, and depressed by the doleful literature she had been reading (for Mrs Ross, like many morbid women, took a kind of delight in reading—if it was a week day—the horrors and disasters and obituaries in the newspaper; or if it was Sunday, she would choose a very denunciatory sermon, or a memoir of some very worthy but somewhat melancholy ecclesiastic).

On this particular day Mrs Ross's headache being worse than usual, and her cold very heavy, the life of the Rev. Robert M'Cheyne had been chosen, and by the time Dolly had read forty pages of it, with its constant refrain, 'Sit thou in the dust, oh, my soul; thou art a weakly worm,' she felt positively choked, and jumping up from her chair, she declared her intention of going out for a little walk in the Park for an hour.

'You won't miss me for that short time, mamma?' she asked. 'It is so hot in here, and I sha'n't sleep a wink if I don't get some fresh air first.'

'Oh, it does not matter about me,' replied her mother, in an aggrieved tone. 'I shall be all alone, of course, but I am accustomed to it now. Don't walk in the crowded part of the Park, Dolly, and pray be home by half-past eight to give me my gruel, for I don't suppose there will be any one in the kitchen to make it.'

Dolly promised to come in in time and sped away, giving a great gasp as she got outside the door, and opening her mouth as if to take in all the oxygen she could.

'That dusty old worm has made me quite sick, I declare,' she ejaculated to herself. 'What a painful person he must have been to know. I suppose I ought to admire him, and yet I don't want to have such a low estimate of my soul either. I wonder if Mr Darrell reads that memoir constantly. He talks as if he quoted from it. Oh, dear! I wonder if I am very worldly and wicked? but I would rather never be good at all than be like those sort of people. I don't believe so much self-abuse is humility at all. It shows an immense amount of thought concentrated on self, and I don't think I'll cultivate the habit. No fear of my ever thinking myself worth much while mamma has the training of me. I wonder if Mr Jefferies calls himself names?'

By this time she had turned into Kensington Gardens, and sitting down on one of the first seats in the Broad Walk, her thoughts were diverted from moralising, and her attention was taken up with watching the endless stream of people passing and re-passing, reminding her in their invariable coupling of the alleged entry into the ark 'in twos and twos.' The time passed very quickly, and she did not notice that the crowd became less, and the couples fewer and further between, and that those who did pass seemed to walk very fast, as if afraid of being late. At last a man came up to her, and, touching his hat, said civilly,—

'Beg pardon, miss, but they are going to shut the gates in a few minutes, and you won't get out if you don't make haste.'

Dolly sprang up with an incredulous exclamation,—

'It can't be so late!'

But at that moment the notes of 'Big Ben' were heard striking the hour.

'*Nine o'clock!* Good gracious; and mamma begged me to be home to get her gruel at half-past eight! She will think I have been all round London by myself, and will never believe I have been sitting quietly here for nearly two hours.'

It was only seven minutes past when she rushed into the kitchen, not waiting to take her hat off before preparing the gruel; and in another ten minutes she had made it and took

it upstairs. It was quite dark, and being Sunday, and the parlour-maid's 'evening out,' no gas was lit anywhere, so Mr Jefferies, flying downstairs with a carpet-bag in his hand, very nearly knocked Miss Ross over, as she was coming slowly up, tray in hand.

'Good gracious, Sarah!' he exclaimed hastily, 'why don't you light the gas, instead of groping about in this way on the stairs.'

Dolly could not help laughing, though she was somewhat confused by this rencontre; and the cup having been upset, its contents were now slowly trickling down the front of her dress.

'It is not Sarah, Mr Jefferies, she is out, I think, and I have been making mamma some hot gruel, as she is in bed with a bad cold.

'And I have upset it, Miss Ross! I am so sorry. How stupid I am. I beg your pardon a thousand times for my awkwardness. Let me at least help you to wipe it off your dress.'

And taking out his pocket-handkerchief, he proceeded to rub the messy liquid off; and though really penitent for having caused the accident, he was secretly blessing the coincidence which had given him the opportunity he had longed for, of seeing her again. She, too, was wondering how she should get out the speech that she had been preparing to say to him ever since their last meeting; and after a little hesitation she plunged into it and said

hurriedly, and with her face bent down over her soiled dress,—

'I want to tell you, Mr Jefferies, how sorry I am I made such an ungracious speech the other night. You must have thought me so ungrateful; and I really am so much obliged to you for all your kindness to me, and patience with my stupidity. And I am so glad we have met to-night, for now you can go away with a better opinion of me.'

If the delinquent Sarah had done her duty, and lighted the gas on the stairs, I don't think Dolly would have had the courage to say all this, but it was so easy in the dark, when her face could not be watched. Bruce Jefferies, too, was glad of the absence of light, for he felt the colour mounting to his temples as she spoke so sweetly and gently, and she would have seen a bright, glad expression cross his face at her last words. But he was not sure of her yet, and he controlled his voice with a great effort as he answered,—

'Nothing could alter my opinion of you, Miss Ross, and I am sorry you should think me so exacting as to require thanks for what has been the greatest self-gratification. I should be glad to think our lessons had not always been tiresome and tedious to you, and that when I am gone you will miss your "professor" a little bit.'

As he spoke he put out his hand and laid it on hers, and at that instant a tell-tale little tear

dropped on to it and said more to him than words could have done. It was the crisis, and he knew then that she did care very much that he was going away, and that he might safely tell her of his love for her, and extract the same sweet confession from her.

Poor Mrs Ross grumbled away to herself upstairs at her daughter's selfish forgetfulness of her, and had she felt less feverish and chilly would certainly have jumped up and gone down in her dressing-gown to see what had become of the servants, if she could not find Dolly. Had she done so, my story would probably never have been written, for she would have been so enraged at the discovery at the foot of the stairs of Mr Jefferies holding Dolly with both his arms round her, and she looking straight up at him with an unaccountably, happy, satisfied expression, that she would probably have had an apoplectic fit, and Bruce and Dolly might have been committed for manslaughter for having caused her so great a shock.

She contented herself, fortunately, with composing a very bitter speech to make to Dolly as soon as she did appear, and with planning in future to restrict these independent wanderings of her daughter's, and make her apron strings considerably shorter.

It was, of course, very inexcusable and thoughtless of Dolly to be so oblivious of her poor sick parent, and Bruce, as a doctor, ought to have known better than to deprive a patient

of the food she was longing for. But it is strange how some things completely chase our duties out of our heads, and there are moments (hours perhaps ?) in our lives when we have been so absorbed in one occupation or passion as to be rendered practically useless to our fellow-creatures. Cynics may sneer at it, philosophers may condemn it, and men and women may deny it ; but it remains a *fact* that love makes fools of us all.

CHAPTER VII.

'FAMILY JARS.'

'DOLLY engaged! Impossible, mother. Where's aunt's note?'

'Here it is, read it for yourself.'

Dudley Ross took the note, which ran thus:—

'My dear Laura,—You have always taken such a kind interest in us that I feel sure you will be glad, though perhaps somewhat astonished, to hear that Dorothy is engaged to Mr Jefferies—a young doctor who has been a fellow-lodger with us for some time. I am quite aware that from a worldly point of view it is a bad match, but a mother's only thought is the happiness of her child, and as I believe my future son-in-law to be a very estimable young man, I hope that my daughter will be happy with him.—With our love to all your circle, believe me, your affectionate sister,

'Anne Ross.'

'Estimable young man indeed! insufferable conceit *I* call it on this fellow Jefferies's part, whoever he is, to offer to marry Dolly on nothing a-year. What a confounded old humbug Aunt Anne is, and what a little fool Dolly has made of herself.' This was the great Sir Dudley's wrathful comment on the Ross's piece of news. 'I declare mother,' he continued, 'I will go and interfere with this nonsense. I am Dolly's guardian, you know, and can act the part of father to her. She is too sensible not to listen to reason, and I am sure she will thank me for helping her out of this foolish entanglement.' And, ringing the bell, he ordered the servant to call him a hansom immediately.

Lady Ross took the matter very calmly. In her heart of hearts she was very glad that Dolly was safe out of her son's way, and not likely to prove a dangerous rival any more to her own daughters. Since her ball, there had been so many inquiries after her 'charming little niece;' and even Janet and good-natured Constance had felt a little irritated at the constant proofs of Dolly's popularity which they received. Lady Ross knew her son too well, however, to oppose him in his fatherly intentions, and sitting down at her writing-table, she merely remarked quietly,—

'I will send a note to Anne by you, Dudley, if you really are going there; but I should advise you to be calm with your aunt and

cousin, for they both have a good deal of perversity in them, and Dolly is especially likely to resent any interference with her plans.'

'Trust me, mother,' he replied complacently, 'I know how to manage most women, and I am well aware that Dolly will never be driven on the curb, and that even a snaffle bit is rather chafing to her. What will you bet on my success now? There's my cab. I'll just run down and get a cigar, and you send your note down when it is finished.'

From Mrs Ross's note to her sister-in-law, it will be gathered that she had got over her dislike to Bruce Jefferies, and that he and Dolly had both been forgiven for their bad conduct on Sunday evening. True, she was very irate at first, and vowed she would never consent to the engagement, but, after a stormy conversation with Dolly, and a calmer interview with Mr Jefferies, she began to modify her views, and by Tuesday evening all her objections had vanished, and she had been persuaded to write and publish the fact to the Rosses in Eaton Square. It was very pleasant to her to be made a fuss with, and Bruce was most attentive and considerate to her, always asking particularly after her health, and treating her with such deference and filial tenderness that she was quite won by it. Dolly, too, was so bright and merry, and seemed so ready to do anything that was required of her, that Mrs Ross could not help admitting

to herself that, so far, everything promised well.

So when Dudley arrived in Southwick Street, prepared to carry all before him, he found a very happy party in the drawing-room, and was somewhat non-plussed in consequence. Dolly was playing the piano, while Bruce stood over her with an air of ownership, and Mrs Ross, writing at a table in the window, had her back turned to the pair, so as not to interfere with their little proceedings.

It was not easy, therefore, under the circumstances, for Dudley to play the part he had intended, and he looked so utterly disgusted and annoyed that they all noticed it, and each put a different construction on his expression. Mrs Ross thought he was angry at not having been first consulted in the matter. Dolly fancied he remembered the last time they had parted, and recognised in Bruce her deliverer on that occasion. And Bruce immediately jumped to the conclusion that he looked upon himself as a rival, and was jealous. All three surmises were right, for Dudley's feelings were complex, and he could not have told himself whether love, wounded pride, or jealousy were uppermost in his mind.

He thought on the whole it would be best to ignore the engagement until he could say all that he intended to, so merely shaking hands all round, he made some casual remark about the weather.

Mrs Ross and Dolly were surprised at his taking no further notice of Mr Jefferies, and wondered if he had heard the news.

'Did your mother receive a note from me this morning?' asked Mrs Ross presently, finding the conversation flagging and the pauses awkward.

'Oh, yes, by the way,' answered Dudley, as if suddenly remembering it, 'I have got a note for you in answer to it, I believe. And then he gave a meaning glance at Dolly's lover, as if to intimate that his presence was a nuisance.

Bruce took the hint, and saying in a low tone to Dolly, 'I'll go and write a letter and come back presently,' he left the room.

When he had gone, Dudley gave the stool that was in front of his chair a violent kick, and exclaimed, 'Thank goodness! now I can speak,' and turning to Dolly, he took her hand and continued, 'And what folly is this, young lady? You don't think I am going to give my consent to your marrying that *inconnu*, do you?'

'I don't understand you in the least,' she replied coldly, and seeking to withdraw her hand.

'Well, you must know that I am your guardian, and that I have much higher aspirations for you than to sit down calmly and see you carried off by an obscure young doctor. You are but a child still, and do not know your own mind. By-and-by, when you are older, and have seen more of the world, we can think about finding you a husband.'

Dolly's indignation knew no bounds at this speech of her cousin's, and she did not attempt to control it. She tossed her little head, and replied, with some warmth,—

'Thank you, I am quite aware of what I have done, and have not the slightest intention of being domineered over; if I choose an "*obscure young doctor*"' (emphasising his own words) 'for my husband, that is my own affair, and if my mother gives her consent that is enough for me.'

'But Aunt Anne can't give her consent to so wretched a match,' he began; but Mrs Ross interrupted him quietly,—

'But I have done so, Dudley. I know from a worldly point of view it is not a brilliant marriage, but Mr Jefferies has every prospect of getting on in his profession, and, as Dr Bury's partner, he will have a very fair position in society.'

'Dr Bury's partner, is he? Well, that makes it a shade less miserable, certainly. But who is he? Who was his father, and who are his relations?'

'Mr Jefferies is a *gentleman*, Dudley,' replied Dolly, stiffly.

'Oh, no doubt. Every one is now-a-days, my dear,' he rejoined, with a sneer. 'But that does not prove his pedigree, and you must excuse my making these inquiries, for the Rosses are not accustomed to associating or connecting themselves with *parvenus*, and, of

course, we should not wish to cut Mrs Bruce Jefferies unless it was unavoidable.'

Dolly could not help thinking how much more of a true gentleman was her lover than this conceited young baronet, with all his boasted ancestry, and she answered contemptuously,—

'If the society of Mr Jefferies would offend your sense of refinement, I am sure his *wife* will be the last person to wish to force it on any one so sensitive.'

And without deigning to say good-bye, she left Dudley to her mother, and went up to her room to cool her cheeks, flaming with anger and insulted pride.

Mrs Ross was much afraid of her nephew. She dreaded a quarrel with any one, and especially any of her husband's relations, who, she knew, had not been so very pleased when the news reached them of Theodore Ross's marriage with herself. So she felt very uncomfortable at this passage of arms between her daughter and Dudley, and did not quite know what to say now she was left alone with him.

'Indeed, Dudley, he is a gentleman,' she began, timidly. 'I believe the father lives in Australia or New Zealand. The mother is dead, and Bruce was the only child, so I don't think Dolly will have any new relations to take up with.'

'Oh, you may be sure there are dozens of

them somewhere in the background, ready to crop up directly they hear of their kinsman's marriage. Those sort of people always get tremendously spunged upon by their poorer relations, and you generally find they are connected with the theatrical profession, or else some of the other quarters of the Bohemian world. Well, I see it is no use trying to convince you. I won't waste any more arguments upon you, aunt; but, mark my words, you'll repent this act of folly.'

And with this ominous prediction, the vanquished 'guardian' took leave of his aunt, and went back to Eaton Square not quite in the best of tempers. He was dreadfully vexed to find Dolly so entirely beyond his influence and control, and was mortified at the rejection of his advice and warning. He did not give up his cherished hopes of winning her for himself, however, and determined to lose no opportunity of ousting his rival and gaining his prize in the end. How he succeeded, and with what results, we shall see hereafter. For the present he was very cross and sulky, and snubbed his sisters to such an extent that they petitioned their mother for an early move out of London, so as to be out of his way, and she, also suffering many things from his bad temper, granted their request, and the whole family, excepting Sir Dudley, flitted from Eaton Square the last week in July to Woodhurst, Kent.

CHAPTER VIII.

'Life may flow on, men be faithless—ay, forsooth and women too,
One is true, and as He liveth, I believe in truth and *you*.'

THAT last week in July was the very happiest in all Dolly Ross's life. I suppose the first week of first love generally is as happy a time as any on this earth can be. It is something quite different to any subsequent experience, the very novelty of it is in itself a delight, and though there may be moments in after life of more exalted feeling and more divine satisfaction, there never returns that joyous *insouciance*, that bright expectancy, and that utter trustfulness in another human being that characterises 'first love.' In all our other loves and passions, intense and real though they may be, we are apt to be over-mastered in our most rapturous moments by a wave of bitter recollection. A word, a look recalls a similar experience, under different circumstances the association carries us back into the past, and for a time we are only conscious of the

life 'which was, and which might now have been.'

Or a flower given us thoughtlessly, may be the same that was offered once as a token of tenderness or of unchanging devotion. The sight of it recalls the whole situation, and the very smell of it sickens us as we remember how the flower and the love faded together years ago, and we ask bitterly, 'And do not all flowers and all loves fade too in the same way?' And well is it for us if at that moment a strong voice beside us, or better still, a stronger one within our hearts, can answer us in the beautiful words of Miss Proctor's poem :—

'Hast thou o'er the clear haven of thy soul
Seen tempests roll?
Hast thou watched all the hopes thou would'st have won,
Fade, one by one?
Wait till the clouds are past, then raise thine eyes
To bluer skies.
Hast thou gone sadly through a dreary night,
And found no light;
No guide, no star to cheer thee through the plain,
No friend, save pain?
Wait, and thy soul shall see, when most forlorn,
Rise a new morn.
Hast thou found life a cheat, and worn in vain
It's iron chain?
Has thy soul bent beneath earth's heavy bond?
Look thou beyond.
If life is bitter—*there* for ever shine
Hopes more divine?

. . . . . .

Hast thou found nought within thy troubled life
Save inward strife?
Hast thou found all she promised thee, deceit,
And hope a cheat?
Endure, and there shall dawn within thy breast
Eternal rest!

I repeat this was Dolly's happiest week, for she was brimful of life and spirit, and it was the greatest possible joy to her to have a strong sympathetic mind like Bruce's always ready to give her advice or help or encouragement. Like all women, she worshipped strength of mind in men, and gloried in surrendering her independence to one who she knew would never exact the sacrifice of her individuality, and in dependence on whom she would only become more self-reliant. Few men are aware of the pleasure that women experience in giving up their wills to a higher will. It is the fashion with the sterner sex to declare that women like their own way, and that no woman is happy unless she can manage her husband. Certainly they have some grounds to go upon for their assertion; but if every case of a self-willed woman were to be analysed, I think my theory would be found to be correct in the end. If a woman feels she has the stronger mind of the two, if her judgment is the clearest, and she is the most far-seeing, then she will undoubtedly assert her right of government over the man, but she will not be satisfied with the state of things, and in nine cases out of ten she will pick out some minister or priest of religion and set him up as her guide in matters spiritual (and perhaps temporal too!), and so her soul gets the necessary guidance, and gains the strength she needed but missed in her hus-

band; and he, utterly unacquainted with that side of her nature, only finds her increasingly 'difficult to manage' as he terms it, and heartily endorses his chum's opinion, expressed very frequently over a cigar in the smoking-room, that 'all women are born with hard mouths, and it's precious few curbs that will pull them in.'

Bruce told Dolly all his own history, and it interested her very deeply. It was a strange one in all its details,—we will not weary the reader with it here,—and quite unlike anything she had ever read or heard of. She was particularly anxious to make Mrs Clark's acquaintance, and hear all she had to tell of Bruce's mother.

The old woman was quite well again now, and was back in Pembroke Road with her niece. So one evening, when Miss Franklin was not acting, Bruce took Dolly there to call, introducing her merely as 'one of my friends, anxious to make Miss Franklin's acquaintance.'

Ernestine liked Bruce very much—he was so different to most of the men calling themselves gentlemen that she met. He never treated her familiarly or cavalierly as they did. He respected her womanhood, and showed it by his manner, and that touched her more than anything—for nothing gives a woman greater self-respect than to be treated with respect. 'Give a dog a bad name and hang him' is

truer, as applied to the theatrical profession, than perhaps any other; and men little know the woful harm, even ruin, they may cause a woman by premising, on first acquaintance, that her profession is a degrading one. It is the individual followers of a profession who make their calling a noble or a debased one, and it is, moreover, the spirit of the public towards that profession which further adds to its degradation or its exaltation.

A quotation from the words of a well-known writer declares further this truth,—

'We talk of a noble and ignoble work, of refined and unrefined, vulgar business; but though noble work cannot be done ignobly, or refined work vulgarly, yet ignoble work may be done nobly, and vulgar work by a delicate spirit.'

Ernestine Franklin felt this very strongly, and was much influenced by it. She used to say that when she talked to Mr Jefferies she felt a lady, and when she talked to her ordinary acquaintances she felt an actress.

It is strange that though men are generally ready enough to affirm that all ladies are actresses, they resent the notion of actresses being ladies, and yet what is the difference? Is it not rather a mere distinction drawn by them from prejudiced ideas on the subject. Why should a woman who, in her daily life humbugs her husband and plays a part foreign to her real nature, be considered a lady merely because she

is born in aristocratic circles, and another woman who is true and honest and fearless and self-reliant in her private life, but who makes the drama her profession, be tabooed in society, and sneered at as 'only an actress?' I do not say that many professional actresses are not often unladylike and unrefined—unfortunately for their art they are so—but I maintain that there is no *professional* obstacle to their being as ladylike and gentle (I use the word in its old-fashioned Saxon sense) as any duchess; and if this fact were more generally recognised and acted upon, we should have fewer theatrical scandals, and far less objectionable and vulgar display.

Dolly told Ernestine how she had seen her act on that occasion when she had gone to the theatre with her cousins, and she could not help wondering what Dudley would say now could he see her sitting in the 'wicked Miss Franklin's' own drawing-room, talking and laughing with her as freely as he himself could have done.

'What profitable reason could Dudley have had,' she asked Bruce as they walked home after this visit, 'for intimating that Miss Franklin was not fit for me to know? There is nothing against her, is there?'

'Nothing, absolutely,' he replied, 'but the fact that she is what she is, that is quite enough with some people, Dolly, to make them not only think all manners of evil, but perform it, too, towards women in that profession. I have

known Miss Franklin now for some months, and made every inquiry about her at the theatre, and I respect and admire her immensely. She is clever and womanly, and capable of an immense amount of endurance, but she has been badly treated once by a man, and it has made her rather bitter and distrustful not only of all other men, but also, I am afraid, of all human nature; and if the other and nobler side of her character were not the strongest, I think she might sometimes be led away into lowering herself by her acquaintances and get herself talked about unpleasantly. It is a dreadful thing, Dolly, when a woman's life is blighted by a man's treachery or selfishness. She is often not strong enough to live through the reaction which follows such a shock, and any false step that she makes is, in my opinion, the man's responsibility, and he will assuredly suffer for it. I can quite imagine a woman not caring what she did, if she were shamelessly betrayed in her affections, and I believe she is more freely forgiven hereafter than we with our miserable want of charity expect.'

'Then if you throw me over, Bruce, you will not be astonished if I marry the first crossing-sweeper?' Dolly asked, laughingly.

They were in Kensington Gardens now, in a very shady spot, so Bruce stopped in his walk, and, looking down at her very lovingly and confidently, he replied,—

'My darling, don't suggest such a terrible thing,—even in joke. If I were to forsake you, *you*, the crown of my life! how could I dare to live long enough afterwards to hear what had become of you? Even then I think I should be man enough to pray that you might be kept from doing anything rash. Dolly, dear, we could never be separated now, you are my little "Dorothea," *i.e.*, gift of God, and I trust no power in heaven or earth could make me give you up "till death us do part."'

Was it a shadow of coming evil which made him so vehement in his protestations of fidelity? and did he almost frighten her by it? Anyhow their walk was resumed almost in perfect silence until they reached home, when Bruce took his leave of Dolly and went on by himself to his new home in Knightsbridge.

Mrs Ross was right when she said Bruce had got good prospects. Dr Burry was a very well-known physician, with a large practice, and it proved no small amount of confidence in Bruce that he took him for his partner. He was very glad when he heard of his young friend's engagement, for he had been much taken with Dolly that evening of Lady Ross's ball, and he said to himself as he passed the pair one day walking together, *Mens sana in corpore sano*, is true of both of them, and they will help each other to help me.'

They were on their way to Wilton Place to see some patterns of carpets which Dolly was

to give her opinion upon. Her artistic taste was a great help in the matter of furnishing, and it was well balanced by her practical mind. She admired art decoration immensely, and if she had had a fortune, would have spent a large portion of it on Morris draperies and Queen Anne furniture; but as it was, she contented herself with choosing the least expensive of all the pretty things, and quite agreed with Bruce that the first outlay was to be on the sanitary arrangement of the house, and that afterwards, when their house was perfectly pure and healthy, they would by degrees beautify it. They both preferred sitting down to dinner with no carpet under their feet, if their economy secured good water on the table, to enjoying a luxurious repast, flavoured with the knowledge that their cisterns were in direct connection with their main drain. Indeed, their conversations were of so scientific and practical a nature during these 'skirmishing afternoons,' as Dolly called them, that anybody expecting to hear sentimentalities exchanged between them would have cried out, 'What a prosaic pair!' No doubt they were, but they neither of them saw any poetry in typhoid fever or other diseases, so often caused by the neglect of sanitation.

Mrs Ross was horrified at this new *craze* (as she considered it) of her daughter's, and was much provoked one day by finding her studying a pamphlet on 'ventilation of pipes.' She

held the old-fashioned notion that woman was made for the world, and not the world for woman, and that to interfere with what are popularly called 'God's visitations' was profane. She attacked Dolly vigorously on the subject, and, with her usual want of logic, she flew off at a tangent, and jumped to the conclusion that women who studied the question of sanitation, hoping thereby to ward off and stamp out blood diseases, must necessarily be infidels and unbelievers in a God of judgment.

'In my young day,' she persisted, 'it was considered blasphemous for men even to reason and explain away the visitations of Providence, and not only do I call it a most unbecoming occupation for a lady, but a very dangerous one as well.'

'Supposing a dead cat were found in our cistern upstairs, mamma,' retorted Dolly, 'you would, I imagine, refuse to have it removed, on the grounds that you were frustrating the design of the Almighty for us all to get diphtheria!'

'What a horrid suggestion! Dead cats, diphtheria! What on earth has the one got to do with the other?' asked Mrs Ross, puzzled.

'Oh, nothing in a general way, certainly, only, if a cat is drowned in our water cistern, the gases which naturally escape from its dead body will infect the water which we afterwards drink, and the living organisms generated in the water entering our thoats produce that

peculiar fungus growth which is the chief symptom of diphtheria.'

'Well, I wish you would change the subject, for I declare you have made me feel quite ill. How Mr Jefferies can allow you to hold those advanced opinions of yours, I can't think. I am glad your poor dear father has been spared the pain of seeing what you have developed into. How grieved he would be if he could hear you now.'

'Would he, indeed?' remarked Dolly, drily, adding mentally, 'I am rather inclined to be thankful, too, that I have been spared the pain of having *two* uncongenial parents instead of one; though, all the same, I believe my father was a sensible man, and would have approved of my education.'

The post came in just then, and, as it often does, produced a diversion, in the shape of two letters, one from Lady Ross to the effect that, owing to symptoms of gout, the doctor had advised her to try German waters, and that, therefore, she feared the pleasure of seeing her (Mrs Ross) and Dolly at Woodhurst would have to be postponed for the present; and the other note was a pressing invitation from the mother of one of Dolly's college friends to go and stay with them in Scotland for a long visit, 'that my Rachel may renew her friendship with your daughter Dorothy, and that we may have the pleasure of showing you some of the beauties of the Highlands,' the lady wrote. Mrs

Ross would not have been herself if she had not grumbled over both these notes. In one breath she inveighed bitterly against Lady Ross's gout, which she seemed to think had been sent especially to spite her, and the next minute she was declaring herself thankful to escape the ordeal of a visit to a place so full of past sad memories to her as Woodhurst.

Kind Mrs Mackenzie's invitation, too, was snarled at.

'How on earth any one living such miles out of civilisation can expect to get people to come and stay with them, I can't think; and as for my undertaking such a journey, I suppose, for your sake, Dolly, I must make an effort and sacrifice my already shattered health.'

If Dolly had only her own wishes to consult, she would most assuredly have chosen to stay in London all the autumn. All she cared for was there, and a separation from Bruce was hard just at first to contemplate. But she knew how necessary change of air for her mother was, and how selfish it would be, on her part, to offer any objections to this proposed visit to Aberdeenshire. So she brightly talked over their journey, and made all the necessary preparations; and four days after saw them starting by the night mail for the north.

Bruce came to see them off, of course, and, though he was quite satisfied that this short absence was necessary, and that, after all, it

was merely a bodily separation, still the parting was not a very cheerful thing, and he tried not to show a tenth part of what he was feeling.

He got into the railway carriage with Dolly, while Mrs Ross was quarrelling with a porter over some trifle or other, and, taking her in his arms, he kissed her passionately, and said,—

'This is not "Good-bye," my darling, it is "Adieu." Keep up your spirits, and, if you are bright and jolly, I shall be too. God bless you, my own "*Theodora*"—'

And then the guard came up and bustled Mrs Ross into the carriage. Bruce was obliged to jump out, and, with a wave of the hand, a smile, and a nod, he saw the little face he loved so well disappear, and he felt a kind of insane longing to follow the guard's example and spring into the moving train.

'Only two months! What a baby I must be to call that a long time; and yet a lifetime does not seem long to spend with her. Ah, well! I must not get mawkish and sentimental; I've plenty of work, and my living friends must not make me forget my dying patients.'

CHAPTER IX.

'TRAITORS WITHIN THE CAMP.'

BRUCE saw a good deal of Miss Franklin in this 'dead season.' She was not acting, so he used to drop in frequently to have a chat with her in the evening, and they became great friends. It was very elevating to her to know a man of Bruce's calibre. His mind was so singularly pure and unworldly, and his influence over her was most refining.

He went in one evening, as was his custom, about five o'clock, and, to his astonishment, found Sir Dudley Ross sitting *tête-à-tête* with Ernestine. He did not know that they were acquainted, and thought, perhaps, that this was a first visit on his part, and that he would therefore prefer being left to enjoy the society of the lady he had come to visit. So, merely shaking hands, Jefferies said he would go away and come another day, and accordingly took his leave, not giving another thought to the incident beyond a passing wonder at Sir Dudley's appear-

ance in town at that season of the year. But when he got home a letter from Dolly explained it in the following sentence :—

'Mother and I leave this on Monday for the Lowick's place, which is somewhere far away in the West Highlands. Dudley is to meet us there on Friday, I believe, and I wish it had been *you* instead that they had asked to meet us!'

So he was on his way to join his aunt and cousin, and was probably in town for a week getting shooting gear. Bruce envied him very much, but it never entered his head to be jealous.

Dudley was equally surprised at Bruce's appearance at Miss Franklin's. So he amused himself with popular actresses during the absence of his betrothed, did he! and the fact that he left the house directly he found he could not be alone with Miss Franklin told against him, Dudley thought. He chuckled over this, and mentally scored it as another reason for hating him. He had no right to be paying attention to two girls at once, and Dolly should know that her paragon lover was no better than anybody else.

Mrs Clark came in just after Bruce had left, and was immensely delighted to find Sir Dudley Ross installed in the drawing-room talking easily to her niece. She was a vain, intriguing old woman, and many and many a scheme had she planned for what she was pleased to call

'dear Ernestine's welfare.' Her present favourite plot was to entrap Sir Dudley, and make him her nephew by marriage. She had learnt too much from the dramatic profession, however, to show her hand openly, and was capable of great diplomacy. She was utterly unscrupulous in her methods of procedure and Jesuitical to the last degree, considering that a good match was an 'end' which justified the employment of any means.

'Mr Jefferies looked in for a minute, aunt,' said Ernestine.

'Oh, did he ? that is the third time this week. He is very attentive, I am sure. What did he want ?'

'To see us, I suppose,' answered she, naïvely.

'*Us* or *you ?*' said the aunt, sarcastically.

'Either or both, I should imagine. You'll excuse me, Sir Dudley, but I am obliged to go out now. I have an engagement to give a lesson in recitation at six, so I must go, or I shall be keeping my pupil.'

'Pray do not let me stand in the way of your duty, dear Ernestine,' replied Dudley, with a great show of politeness, and rising to open the door for her.

She flashed a look of disdain at him from her great expressive grey eyes for having taken the liberty of using her Christian name, but she said nothing, and merely trusted that her look had been sufficient to teach him better in future. When she had gone Sir Dudley turned to Mrs

Clark, and asked how long Mr Jefferies had been so devoted a friend of theirs.

'It is now six months or more since I was run over and taken to an hospital, and he was the doctor that attended me at the time. He was very good to me certainly, but he is more attentive to my niece than he need be, I think, and I am not anxious to have him for a nephew, because of his connexions. I knew his mother very well, and though I was fond of her, I hated the man she married. This is her picture, Sir Dudley; perhaps you see the strong likeness to Mr Jefferies in it.'

And she took the painting of the *danseuse* off the table, and handed it to him.

He was certainly amazed at this new discovery, and his blood boiled within him at the thought of this man (who he knew all along was a *parvenu*) having had the audacity to propose and engage himself to *his cousin*.

It was not so much for Dolly's sake that he was furious as for his own, as being connected with her, and so through her to this interloper. This was, of course, quite sufficient ground for the engagement to be broken off, and he was thankful he had found it all out in time, and could put the matter in its true and proper light before his aunt the following week when they met in Scotland.

'Tell me,' he pursued, anxious if possible to find out more facts against his rival, 'had this woman any other children?'

'None *after* her marriage,' replied Mrs Clark, with emphasis.

'And you are sure, of course, that this man is the only one?'

An evil thought flashed into his mind as he asked this question. What if this old person could prove that Bruce were not the lawful son—but otherwise! What a trump card that would be. He was not vile enough to suggest the *concoction* of such a fact to Mrs Clark, but, alas! the same thought, in a different form, had occurred to her. What if she could prove that Bruce were insulting Ernestine by his friendship—what difference would that make to the girl's chance of winning Sir Dudley? Rapidly she went over the case as it stood before her then, and she came to the conclusion that it was a high stake to play for, and worth a good deal of sacrifice, and she believed it not improbable that Sir Dudley's evident jealousy of Bruce was founded on his love for her niece, and that, in getting him out of the way, she would clear the field for the baronet.

Dolly, poor innocent child, little suspected that a plot was being laid that night to blight her own life and the life of him whom she loved far more than herself. Such treachery as this she was incapable of conceiving, and, indeed, had she been told of it in time, she would have refused to believe it.

So Mrs Clark yielded to her tempter, and before Sir Dudley left her house that evening,

she had succeeded in establishing a very firm doubt in his mind as to Bruce's claim to the name of Jefferies, and with many assurances of profound secrecy and unabated friendship they parted, and next morning Bruce received a few lines from Mrs Clark, asking him to go and see her that day, as she had a slight matter of business to talk over with him.

And this was the woman whose life he had saved in the hospital, and whom he had tended with no ordinary professional care.

He was ushered into the drawing-room, and found it empty, so, until his hostess appeared, he took up his mother's picture and gazed earnestly at it.

'It is just as well she is not alive, he thought. Mrs Ross and she would never get on!'

'Ah! Mr Jefferies! admiring your sweet mother as usual, I see! Sit down, I want to talk to you about her,' said Mrs Clark, coming into the room. 'How old are you?'

'Twenty-nine,' he replied, astonished at the question. Mrs Clark's face fell, and she said slowly,—

'Then you must have been born a year earlier than I thought, for all my calculations made you twenty-eight, and I am sorry, grievously sorry, dear Mr Jefferies, that it is so, for I fear . . . . in fact I see . . . . perhaps you will look at that paper and you will see what I mean.'

And she handed him a letter, which he took in silence and read. It was written in a childish, uneducated hand, and looked as if it was many, many years old. It ran thus :—

'DEAR ROSALIND,—i am a happy wife now. Mr Jefferys has married me all fair. i hope baby will get through his teetheing all rite. he must be ten month old now. i shall dance again next season and do come and dress me again as you always did. you always made me look so nice. my love dear Rosallind. your very true friend. LIZZIE DE BROUSA.'

(no. i mean. Lizzie *Jefferys.*)

The date which this letter bore did not appear on itself, but on the post-mark of the envelope which had contained it was stamped distinctly enough, 'Mar. 4.49.' Exactly ten months after Bruce's own birth, or at any rate what he had always supposed was the date of his own birth. What Mrs Clark wanted to tell him was evident enough now, and Bruce took it all in, unable, however, to comprehend fully the whole situation in which he was placed, and it also occurred to him to ask why she had suddenly produced this letter instead of having done so when he first declared his origin and parentage.

She answered that she had only found it the evening before amongst some very old theatrical receipts, and, painful though it was to her, she

thought it her duty to send for him and tell him what she had discovered.

'But if I am not the boy that was born in '50, Mrs Clark, where is he?'

'I wish I could tell you, my dear friend. The first time I saw you was five or six years after your dear mother's death, and I never heard of there being another child living. You are not angry with me, I hope,' she went on, in a whiny sort of voice, 'for having been a faithful friend to you? Believe me I would gladly have spared you if I could.'

Bruce was incapable of suspecting this woman of foul play, and he merely looked at her sadly and absently, as if he scarcely saw her, answering quietly,—

'I thank you for telling me the truth, if indeed such it is. But I cannot rest until I have seen my father, and found out the positive fact of my birth and seen the register of it. Goodbye, Mrs Clark—this is, of course, a sacred secret between us until I have succeeded in my search.'

He left the house like a man in a dream, and walked on and on, he knew not where, until suddenly finding himself at the far end of Hammersmith, he mechanically pulled out his watch and walked home.

He found Dr Bury had twice sent for him since he went out, so he hurried round to Chesham Place, and proceeded straight to the doctor's study.

The kind old man was quite horror-struck at his young partner's face. It was as white as a sheet, and he looked as if he had been violently terrified or otherwise injured mentally.

'Sit down, Jefferies, you look tired,' was his only greeting, however, for he felt sure Bruce would tell him what had occurred to account for this strange look.

In a few moments Bruce had recovered himself sufficiently to unburden his heart to his friend, and he received such rare and tender sympathy that few are able to give. But Dr Bury was no ordinary professional, hardened by the sight of constant suffering into a mechanical confessor of physical woes. His was a living human heart still, and the reason of his great popularity was partly due to his great power of sympathy and his quiet, calm judgment, which never failed to carry weight with those in need of counsel and help. He heard patiently all that his partner had to say, and then spoke decidedly in favour of his going out to Australia without delay, and, finding his father, insist on knowing the whole unvarnished truth about his mother's history. He counselled him also not to let a suspicion of the real cause of his journey be known, least of all to Miss Ross; for he rightly argued that the suspense she would have to bear during Bruce's absence, and the long weary watching for an uncertain issue, would probably be too great a

strain on her. Bruce should, of course, explain that very urgent family reasons demanded his immediate presence at the other side of the globe.

'But depend upon it, Jefferies, if the girl's worth her salt,—and I believe *she is* in this case,—she will trust you that length of time, and, if your worst fears should be realised, then you can break it to her more easily, and the material separation will have broken the shock to her.'

Bruce never forgot the kindness of Dr Bury at this trying crisis of his life, and always said afterwards that he owed the preservation of his reason to this good and true friend.

He could not write to Dolly, somehow. He began a letter every day, but at last resolved to put it off till Wednesday, when he should have taken his passage, and made all his arrangements, and the first link between them had been cut.

It was Thursday, however, before the letter was satisfactorily indited, and this was all he could bring himself to say,—

'My Darling,—A terrible cloud has come over my life since I last wrote, and it is necessary for me to go out to Australia to see my father on family matters of importance. I sail on Saturday, and I can give you no address until I arrive. Assurances of love, of trust, of devotion, are needless. I know that my

darling trusts me as I do her—*utterly*. Nothing can take her from my heart, or make her more the essence of my life than she is at present. Into God's keeping I commit you, my little Dora.—Believe always unswervingly in your faithful BRUCE.'

When he came to addressing the letter, he remembered that he did not know where Dolly was staying. 'The Lowick's place, somewhere in the West Highlands,' she had said in her last letter. That sentence recalled the fact that Sir Dudley Ross was going to join them there, so of course he would know, and without further hesitation Bruce set off to the Conservative Club, where he knew Sir Dudley was generally to be found in the afternoon.

'Gone out, sir, will be back at six o'clock,' was the porter's announcement, however, so Bruce was obliged to exercise a little patience, and spend the intervening time with finishing off some of his necessary shopping. Several windows tempted him sorely to buy things for Dolly, but whenever he stopped for the purpose, he was suddenly checked by the thought,—'No, I have no right to heap her with presents which she will probably have to return in another few months,' and, in the bitterness of spirit which followed this thought, he strode on.

He could not eke out the whole of the afternoon in the streets, so at half-past five he

went back to the Club, and, leaving his card, was rejoiced to learn from the hall-porter that Sir Dudley had just come in, and was in the reading-room.

It was too late now for his letter to go by the country post, and Bruce was much vexed at having missed it, for now Dolly could not hear from him before Sunday at the earliest. It could not be helped, however, and it was no good wasting more time over regrets, so he hastened into the reading-room and found Sir Dudley reading the *Globe*. He looked surprised on seeing his visitor, and asked sarcastically to what he was 'indebted for the honour of this visit?'

Bruce had fully made up his mind what he should say if asked any questions, so he answered,—

'Urgent business calls me to Australia, Sir Dudley, and as I naturally wish to inform Miss Ross of my movements, I came to ask you her present address. She gave me none in her last letter, but mentioned that you were to join them at the Lowick's place in the west of Scotland, and I thought you would kindly fill up the details of the address, and tell me the post-town.'

'Really! you surprise me. And when do you start?

'On Saturday.'

'And my cousin knows nothing of your intention! You are marvellously discreet,

Jefferies, to keep her in the dark as to your plans.

'Miss Ross and I understand one another,' was Bruce's proud rejoinder.

'Well, well, it's no affair of mine. I am going up to Scotland myself this very evening, and if you like to entrust your letter to my care, I will safely deliver it to-morrow. I expect to reach my aunt and Dolly to-morrow night, and I think I shall take it quicker than the post now, for you have missed to-night's mail, which will be delivered on Saturday morning, and any letter posted to-morrow will lie in the Scotch post-office all "Saabath," and will not be delivered till Monday.'

'Thank you, Sir Dudley, you are very kind. I will certainly accept your offer. How shall I let you have it? for it is not here.'

'Bring it to Euston Station to-night. I start at 8.45.'

Bruce shook hands warmly with his (unknown) enemy, and promised to turn up in due time at the station with his precious missive; and three hours later Sir Dudley, letter and all, were rushing along on their way to the north, at the rate of thirty miles an hour; and in another twenty-four hours Dolly will know that in the case of true love all does not run smooth.

CHAPTER X.

A TRIAL OF FAITH.

DUDLEY ROSS had seldom felt more pleased or contented than he did on this Thursday night that he spent in the train. Occasionally, when he won largely at whist, or a horse that he had backed heavily had been successful at several race meetings, he had experienced the same glow of satisfaction; but perhaps nothing quite came up to his present feeling of triumphant rejoicing over the discomfiture of his rival. Mrs Clark had written him word of her interview with Jefferies, and, to do him justice, it is only fair to say that he fully believed the authenticity of that letter from Mrs Jefferies; and no further doubt remained in his mind of the illegality of Bruce's birth.

He settled himself, therefore, in his cushioned seat to-night with a very comfortable conviction that he was on his way to the winning-post, with Dolly for his prize; and he took out a bundle of letters and papers to read

leisurely as he went along, confident that he had nothing to fear from any man, and boasting to himself of his prosperity, his good luck, and his sagacity.

'A tailor's bill! *that* will keep. "Beale & Inman" ditto, ditto—impudence, these fellows sending in their bills quarterly like this. What's this? A circular of a "dramatic club," ha! ha! more in Jefferies's line than mine! Another circular in black edge, "Reformed funerals!" Confound it! that's not in my line either. "Miss Dorothea Ross," oh, that's Jefferies's letter. I should uncommonly like to know how much of the truth he's told her. I've a great mind to throw the thing out of the window, only I suppose some beast of a pointsman would pick it up, and take it to the dead-letter office. I think my story will pretty well cancel anything he may have written, though. Here's a letter from Crooks, bother him! What does he want?'

'"DEAR SIR,—Mr Bell says he cannot put off pulling down the cottages on the Holme estate later than January. Enclosed are the plans for the new buildings, which you will be good enough to look over at your leisure.—Your obedient servant, THOMAS CROOKS."

'Ah! January; well, that will keep for the present,' and the agent's note with Dolly's letter was put into the same blue envelope, and stowed away in Sir Dudley's letter-case.

He arrived at Balmacarra, where the Lowicks lived, on Friday evening, half-an-hour before

dinner. Dolly had gone to bed with a bad headache, so he scored one more point, for he got Mrs Ross all to himself, and made good use of his opportunity before her strong-willed little daughter got a chance of putting in a word of defence.

After dinner, during which time Dudley made himself very agreeable to his hostess, he dropped into a chair by his aunt, and said shortly,—

'I saw Jefferies yesterday, aunt.'

'Did you? What had he to say for himself? Dolly has been fidgetting because he has not written to her for nearly a week.'

'I am glad he showed so much good feeling, Aunt Anne. He has no right to say anything more at all for himself.'

'What do you mean? Has he quarrelled with Dr Bury, or lost all his money, or what?'

'No, no; he has not lost his partner or his money, but something *far* more valuable, and something which millions of money could never buy for him. It is a terrible story, my dear aunt, and I cannot tell you the details now; some other time, when I can see you alone, I will enlighten you as to the true character of the man to whose keeping you propose entrusting your daughter.'

His words had the desired effect of rousing the very worst fears in Mrs Ross's mind and frightening her completely.

'Dudley,' she said tremblingly, 'what awful

news is this? You must relieve my suspense. Come into my dressing-room to-night when you have done smoking, and tell me all. I *must* know at once. I could never sleep with such horrible suspicions in my mind. Knock gently at the door at the end of the first passage, and we can talk quite freely without any fear of Dolly hearing us.

Accordingly, at eleven o'clock, Sir Dudley excused himself from the smoking-room, on the plea of being awfully sleepy and good for nothing after his long journey, and knocking softly at Mrs Ross's door he was admitted by that good, but somewhat nervous, lady, and motioned to a chair, and enjoined to be very quiet with much dumb show.

'Dolly is not asleep, Dudley,' whispered she in a low voice, 'so you must not get excited or talk loud. I don't think she will hear you unless you do. So be quick and tell me what you know against Mr Jefferies.'

Dudley began without further preamble.

'Well, aunt, you must know that Jefferies's father was a very good-for-nothing sort of chap, who made more friends behind the scenes of the theatre than he should have done. His wife was an actress, or rather a ballet-dancer—don't start, Aunt Anne, lots of men do it—and so far it was all square enough if they had not had any children to think of.'

Mrs Ross here interrupted him with a wild look of horror on her face.

'*Children!* you don't mean to tell me that Bruce Jefferies's mother was an *actress?* My daughter connected with the stage. Good heavens, Dudley, what an escape for my poor child! Go on; what else is there?'

'My dear aunt, if you excite yourself like this at the first outset, you will never be able to listen to all I have got to tell you. I wish I could spare you, but it is my painful duty to save Dolly from so unworthy a fate. I will cut the story as short as I can, and tell you the real truth of the matter, which is that the man you propose to make your son-in-law has no right to his name, for he had *no lawful father.* The date of his birth antedates his mother's marriage by nearly a year.'

This last statement nearly caused Mrs Ross to have a fit. Dimly, in wicked books, she had an idea that such things were heard of; but her life had been cast in too narrow and eminently respectable a sphere for her ever to have come in contact with anyone who had not been married in the most orthodox fashion—in church, with an attendant train of bridesmaid-witnesses — and her sense of propriety was hopelessly outraged at the bare mention of such a fact as Dudley related to her. She covered her face with her hands, and could not speak for some time.

Dudley was secretly amused at the shock which his revelation had given her. He supposed it was right and proper that she should

be so much shocked, but his inmost heart told him that were he not a jealous rival of Jefferies and a cousin of Dolly's, he would not have thought twice about it, and would only have laid it by in his memory as one of the many queer stories one hears every day about people living all round us in the world.

But he had to keep up his part of family adviser and moral confessor, so he said softly to his aunt,—

'It is very dreadful for you, my poor aunt, and I need hardly tell you how deeply and sincerely I sympathise with you in this great trial. You will hardly like to tell Dolly, I suppose?'

'Tell her? Of course I must,' replied Mrs Ross warmly.

'And you think she will believe it and give him up?'

'Dudley, are you *mad?* What do you take Dolly for? Of course she will see as I do the proper course to take, and as for giving him up, why, I know she will half kill herself with remorse for having ever spoken to him. I will go to bed now, I think. I thank you from the bottom of my heart, my dear nephew, for your great kindness and faithfulness in telling me the dreadful truth. I shudder when I think of it even. Good night.'

'The old lady is easily managed. Not so the young one, I fear. Miss Dolly will not swallow it all so readily, I guess, and there will

be a good deal of struggling and fighting to-morrow. I shall keep out of the way until the child comes round a bit, for she is mine now, and I mustn't lose her by want of caution ;' and with these thoughts Dudley went to sleep.

My readers will not be astonished when I tell them that Mrs Ross found it a more difficult task than she expected to convince her daughter that her idol was to be dragged off its pedestal thus rudely, and broken to pieces. She would not allow her mother to refer to the subject even, for two or three days, and declared she would wait for Bruce's own version, which she knew would come before long.

Dudley was too wise to try and persuade her to listen to reason, and merely contented himself with asking her each morning, in an off-hand sort of way, if she had got her letter ? It was nothing to him that she refused to believe his story yet. He knew she would know, sooner or later, that it was true, and supposed it was only natural that her pride should keep her from believing too readily that she had been so utterly deceived in the man she loved.

They misunderstood her completely. She cared nothing for the *alleged* reason of his silence towards her. As for 'a muddle about his parentage' (as prude Mrs Ross had called it to her daughter), she never gave it a thought. He was *Bruce* to her, and the idol of her heart ; and if he had been as marvellous as Melchisedek, without father or

mother or descent, she would have loved him just the same. But why did he not write? It was cruel to keep her in suspense; and what had Dudley said one morning about his having sailed for Australia? He must have made a mistake, or the letter from Bruce acquainting her of the news must have been lost in the post. She trusted him as yet too completely to have a doubt of his fidelity to her, but when Tuesday morning came, and the post brought no letter, she made up her mind to ask Dudley again what he had said about 'having seen Jefferies for an instant the other day.'

She looked very pale and wan, poor child, when she went to find her cousin, and he felt almost sorry for her evident distress. But the thought of his own chance set him up on his high moral stilts again, and, with a patronising gesture, he declared himself quite at her service, and ready to talk to her on any subject she liked.

'Thank you, Dudley,' she replied listlessly. 'Will you please tell me what Mr Jefferies said—*word for word*—when you saw him last week?'

He gave a long low whistle, and answered,—

'Oho! that's what you want, is it? Well, I am afraid, dear, I don't remember what we did say to each other. He told me, I know, that he was to sail on Saturday for Melbourne, but I did not ask the name of his ship, nor the reason for his sudden departure. I did not

know, of course, that he had not written to tell you, or I might have got some more information out of him. Nor did I know then all that I learnt afterwards about him.'

And Dudley began whistling a tune and knocking the billiard balls about—his favourite amusement for an hour after breakfast.

Dolly did not speak for some minutes, then she laid her hand on her cousin's arm, and said very gently,—

'Dudley, did Mr Jefferies send me any message by you?'

He suddenly turned his back upon her, and busied himself with finding the chalk under the billiard table. When he spoke his face was calm again, and the colour which suffused it for a second following her question left it.

'My poor child, I wish he had! No, he said nothing about you. I am afraid it is only too true that he has gone to the other side of the world so as to be out of your way, for he knows that he has no right to your love; and though it is a cowardly thing to do—to run away—still, perhaps, it is the kindest thing he could have done for your sake under the very distressing circumstances.'

Dolly laid her head down on Dudley's arm and fairly sobbed.

'It's too dreadful,' she cried; 'I can't believe it. It's like a bad dream. Oh, Dudley, I have trusted him so! tell me it is not true. Let me go to London and find out where he

is, and why he does not write. I shall go mad here in this hateful Scotland. Why did I ever leave him, my good, brave Bruce? I would have gone with him gladly to Australia or anywhere. Why has he gone without me?'

Dudley let her talk on in this strain for some time, and then he said quietly,—

'It is very hard for you, dear, and I am very, very sorry for you. I will talk to Aunt Anne about going south if you like, but I am afraid you will not do much good in London. Even if Mr Jefferies had put off sailing on Saturday, it is not likely you would be able to find him out, for he would write to you if he wished you to know of his movements.'

These words did not comfort Dolly much, but she felt more satisfied when her face was turned southwards, and she found herself in the train on the way to London.

October was a dreary month in town. It has been said that in August, September, and October the only sights to be seen in London are steam-rollers, doctors' assistants, and junior curates. And certainly there is a great preponderance of these three accessories of life at that season of the year.

Dudley was very anxious that his aunt and cousin should not stay in London long, and at last persuaded them to go down to Brighton for a month, while he went abroad to join his mother and sisters at Homburg for a time.

The return to the lodgings in Southwick Street had been a very great ordeal to Dolly. The whole scene reminded her so painfully of the last happy day she had spent there, and she could not help listening all day for the footstep which never came, and dwelling on the memory of the face which never appeared now, as formerly, smiling in the doorway, with a glad look of confidence on it. She clung to the house though, and begged her mother not to go away again. But Mrs Ross saw that the associations of the place were far too strong for her, and that her health would very soon give way under so constant a strain; so, with a great semblance of harshness, she forced Dolly to pack up once more and make up her mind to go to Brighton, and she was very glad she had made the arrangement when she found Dolly, the evening before their departure, on her knees down in the dining-room—Bruce's sitting-room in the days when he lodged there—her head resting on the table, and sobbing as if her heart would break.

Mrs Ross was obliged to confess that her daughter puzzled her. She could not understand why she continued to pine after a man who had so evidently thrown her over, and who had turned out such an unworthy suitor. Moreover, she thought her family pride would have strengthened her more than to allow her to give him further consideration. She knew that had it been her own case, she would have

felt only too thankful to have discovered the truth before instead of after marriage; and she was inclined to be very angry with Dolly for so steadily refusing to see the matter in its 'proper light.'

It was difficult, even for her though, to be angry with Dolly long. The child was so changed. She looked so pale and weary, and it was quite painful to see the start she gave and the eager wistful look which always came into her face when the postman's knock was heard, or when the door bell rang at any unusual hour.

She went about as usual and never neglected any of her filial duties, reading to her mother and writing her letters for her just as she always had done; but the bright spirit had left her, and all was done mechanically. It was a colder October than usual, and Mrs Ross found it such chilly work going out in a bath chair up and down that bleak 'King's Road,' that Dolly generally took her walks alone, and her favourite resort was the far end of the old chain pier, where she could sit and think unmolested, and where she could gaze far away over the sea and try and imagine she could see beyond the horizon and distinguish in some of the cloud-banks the coast of Australia. She felt quite excited when a large vessel was sighted, and she used to ask eagerly of the old boatmen on the shore whether that was 'a ship bound for Australia.' 'Ay, ay,

Miss, one of them furrin parts sure enough,' was generally the vague answer she received, and she got no consolation out of these unsympathetic old men.

Dudley came back from Homburg on the 28th of October, and brought a not very cordial note from his mother to Mrs Ross, begging her to go and stay at Woodhurst with Dolly for the winter, she and her daughters having made up their minds to spend three or four months longer on the Continent, and as the big manor house was there it might as well be occupied.

So after some hesitation on Mrs Ross's part, and a great deal of opposition on Dolly's, the invitation was accepted, and on the 7th of November Dudley had the pleasure of installing his aunt as mistress, *pro tem.*, in his own house, and of seeing Dolly occupy the room she was born in, and which, but for her father's premature death, she would never have surrendered to her cousins. It was his first step towards victory, and he was quite satisfied with events so far, and began almost to congratulate himself already on his success and his own skill in achieving it.

CHAPTER XI.

'VICTORY!'

AFTER the first bitterness had worn off of coming back to her lost home, Mrs Ross was very contented in the manor house. It was a pleasant change, from perpetual lodgings, to have a luxurious house and well-trained servants. Her 'shattered' nerves began to recover themselves, and once or twice Dudley was quite surprised at the change which had come over his aunt. Her face, usually so lugubrious and thin, had quite a fat, complacent look about it sometimes, and her voice seemed to have lost its aggrieved tone, and to be pitched in a pleasanter key. He wished the change had an equally good effect upon Dolly. She was just as good and sweet as ever; and she was most popular in the village, and with all the neighbours, but she was terribly listless and spiritless—her very figure looked limp, and she had lost that bright, piquant expression which had fascinated so many people at Lady Ross's ball the season before.

Her passionate longing for Bruce had subsided into a kind of dull despair, and she might have sat for a picture of Tennyson's 'Mariana,' with the words on her lips,—

> 'I am aweary, aweary of living,
> I would that I were dead.'

Not that she expressed any such sentiment—far from it; she often despised herself for dwelling so much on her own sorrow, and tried hard to forget it in doing work for others, and helping to bear the sorrows of her fellow-creatures; but in spite of all her noble efforts, she was what men would call 'hard hit;' and she could not disguise a weariness, which was partly physical, making itself felt in her every speech and attitude. She struggled hard all the winter before Christmas to keep up her district visiting and Sunday-school teaching, which she had undertaken at once, at the vicar's request, her cousins being absent, and the parish greatly in need of ladies to visit in it. The boys in her class became perfectly devoted to her, and on the dark winter afternoons they would walk back with her to the manor gate, and quarrel all the way for the place of honour next to her, so as to be able to protect her from dangers, real or imaginary. Dudley generally spent Sunday down at Woodhurst, and he not unfrequently went to meet Dolly as she came home from her class, and relieved her body-guard of their attendance on

her; but the boys rather resented this act of interference on his part, and once or twice they were cunning enough to allure Dolly into walking home a different and a much longer way, on the pretext that the high road was too muddy for her, and the other one really shorter, if they only were more accustomed to it. But these sturdy young followers had to give up their idolised teacher at the end of the year, for Dolly caught a bad cold, and was forbidden to be out after sunset, or, indeed, in any very bitter weather, so her class had to be surrendered into the hands of a very 'genteel' young person, who kept a milliner's shop in the village, and who, I am sorry to say, was always allowed to walk home alone and unattended by any of her hitherto gallant boys; and everyone began to find out Miss Dorothea Ross's worth, and how much they all missed her sweet, sympathetic face amongst them.

Her cough became so troublesome at last that Dudley persuaded Mrs Ross to take her up to London to see one of the great chest doctors, who shook his head, and said that the young lady had a fine constitution naturally, and might pick up flesh and strength if she went abroad as soon as the frost broke up, but if she stayed in England and faced the bitter March winds, he would not answer for the consequences.

Dolly wanted to see Dr Bury, but, to her grief, not only did her mother refuse her

request, but on inquiring after their old friend of the other doctor, he informed them that he had died a month before of sudden seizure of the heart.

'Bruce *will* be sorry,' was Dolly's first thought, and she felt grieved that another link of the past should have gone when she had so few left.

It had not been thought advisable for Dolly to undertake two journeys in one day, so the Rosses stayed at the Grosvenor Hotel for the night, and spent the afternoon shopping.

Mrs Ross was much upset at the doctor's verdict. She hated the idea of going abroad when she was so comfortably settled now, and she felt sure it lay in Dolly's own power to get strong if she liked. It was all this stupid fretting that was telling on her health, and she worked herself up into quite a temper on the subject, so that Dolly had anything but an enjoyable day in London, and when Dudley met them next morning at the station to go down home with them, he thought her looking more ill and sad than ever.

Mrs Ross took him aside before they started, and told him what Dr G— had said, and Dudley made up his mind then and there to strike the blow at once, and lose no more time about making Dolly his wife, thus solving the difficulty of taking her abroad, for he would do it himself, and leave Mrs Ross in sole possession of her old home.

He said nothing, however, during the

journey, and devoted himself to Dolly, hoping to rouse her a little to talk.

'I went to the theatre last night,' he began.

'Did you? Was it nice?' and then the word theatre recalled to her mind that first time she had gone with her cousins and had seen Miss Franklin act, and with the actress's name flashed into her brain a sudden inspiration.

She would know of Bruce's whereabouts, most likely. He had seen her, he said, the very day he wrote his last letter to Dolly, and she might possibly clear up the whole mystery, or at any rate give some address for Dolly to write to.

This idea brought hope and brightness into her face, and she looked quite animated as she bent forward on her seat, and asked Dudley in an eager whisper if he had seen Miss Franklin lately. He would know her address, and Dolly would then go and call and find out all she wanted without any one knowing of her doing so.

He remembered their little argument about actresses, and hesitated a moment before he answered her with the truth.

'Yes, I saw her only yesterday. Why?'

'Oh, I don't know. I thought you saw her act, perhaps.'

'No, she is not acting any more in England for the present. She starts to-morrow for America, as she has been engaged by one of the managers in New York for the winter season.'

He could not help noticing how the pretty colour, so seldom called up now in the little face before him, died away at his answer, and he wondered what had been her train of thought. He could not make her talk any more that afternoon, so he gave himself up to his own meditations, and the planning of his best mode of storming this impenetrable little fortress.

After dinner he laid his hand on Mrs Ross's arm, and said, 'One minute, aunt. I should like to detain you, if Dolly will excuse us.' And then he quietly and deliberately explained his whole purpose of making Dolly his wife.

'Once Lady Ross, aunt, you will see she will pick up her strength, the new life will bring fresh interests, and I shall, as her husband, be able to take her about wherever it is thought best for her to go. Pau, Nice, Mentone, Rome, anywhere she fancies, I will take her. You will be free to stay here during our absence, and when we come back you must, of course, make your home with us. My mother knows I have intended taking this step for some time, and will be quite prepared to give up the manor to my wife. She will settle herself in the Eaton Square house for the greater part of the year, and will go abroad generally, I expect, in the autumn. This neighbourhood is too quiet for my sisters. I don't think Dolly will mind the dulness, especially after a long tour abroad.'

Mrs Ross's delight knew no bounds. To see her daughter Lady Ross, and, above all, restored to her rightful home! that was most unlooked for good fortune, and she felt much inclined to burst into tears of joy and thankfulness at such a solution of all their difficulties, and such an end to all their recent troubles.

'But will Dolly listen to you?' she asked fearfully.

'I *think* so,' he replied slowly. 'At any rate I mean to try—and if possible to-morrow, or even to-night, if I could get the opportunity.'

'I will go to bed early,' exclaimed his aunt, only too eager to remove any obstacle to an immediate settlement of so perfect a plan. 'I am really tired, and Dolly will not think it odd if I make that my excuse for leaving you alone.

And, without another word, she bustled upstairs, and, after much shuffling about from one chair to another, and making a great show of occupying herself, she at last declared she was too tired to sit up any longer, and departed to her bedroom.

When Dudley came up he pretended to be much astonished at finding his aunt gone to bed, and, sitting down beside Dolly on the sofa, he began playing with her crewels and pulling her work-things about.

'So you are ordered away from here, Dolly?' he said, by way of a beginning.

'Mamma has told you then, has she? Poor mamma! she is very miserable at the thoughts

of going abroad, and I hate dragging her away from this place, where she is so happy. I am so vexed with myself for having caught cold, and requiring coddling and care. I am sure I am as strong as possible, really, Don't you think so, Dudley?'

'No, indeed, I don't,' he replied gravely, 'and I am certain you want a thorough change of air and scene. Shall you be sorry to leave the manor house, Dolly?'

'Sorry?—oh, yes—for some things. I have been quite contented here. Don't think me ungrateful, Dudley,' she said quickly, her eyes filling with tears, 'but you know how impossible it is for me to be really happy anywhere just yet. Some day, perhaps,—I don't know,—but I may get accustomed to it all, and feel jolly again. But I am very, very grateful to you for your great kindness, and I wish I could show you more how much I have felt it.'

'You *can* show me, Dolly. You can repay me to-night by saying one single word. Will you let me take care of you, and guard you, and make you happy; will you let me love you, and will you try and love me just a little?'

'But how can I, except—'

'As *my wife*. Dolly, wont you?'

He was quite close to her now, one arm he had thrown round her, and the other hand he laid on hers to prevent her going on with her work. His words were gentle and his tones so pleading

that Dolly could not help feeling touched. His next words, too, had the crowning effect upon her.

'You, who know what it is to suffer, will not willingly cause suffering, and you will not withhold a great happiness when it is in your power to give it.'

She made one struggle, and said, keeping her eyes fixed on her lap, in which rested their three hands.

'This is such a surprise, Dudley, I had no idea you loved me more than as your cousin.'

'Then I have kept my secret well indeed, Dolly. My love for you is not new now. I loved you from the first moment that I saw you, and I am no foolish youth to be taken with every girl I meet. I am thirty-five now, you know, and a man knows his own mind perhaps better at that age than any other. He has got over his early calf-loves and ball-room fancies, and has not gone into his dotage, when so many men make double-distilled fools of themselves. I am strong and healthy, and able to give you protection, care, position, money, everything you can want. You have only to place your hand in mine, and say "Yes," and you will be able to feel that you have made one man happy for the rest of his life, which is no small achievement for a woman, let me tell you.'

She was astounded at her own calmness. Had she been told six months before that her (then hated) cousin Dudley would be making love to her in his own house, and she sitting

quietly listening to it all, she would have laughed at the prophecy, with her merry, ringing laugh, and thought it rather a bad joke than otherwise; but now, she actually had not a word to say. Of course, she did not love him, but she had come to think latterly that love was quite a mistake, and that it certainly had only marred her life instead of illumining it, and here was this man, literally at her feet, asking her for no passionate return of his love, making no exacting demands, save this one—she was to be his *wife*, 'till death us do part.'

The words rang in her ears, and she heard Bruce's voice repeating them. How loving, and true and noble he had looked then! She had believed he meant nothing but death to part them, and yet had death intervened between him and her? She did not know. She remembered his other words,—

'If I were to forsake you, how could I dare to live long enough afterwards to hear what had become of you. Even then I think I should be man enough to pray that you might be kept from doing anything rash with yourself.'

Was he alive now, and was he praying for her wisdom and safety? This was the turning point in her decision, and laying her hand on Dudley's shoulder she looked straight into his face and said simply,—

'Yes.'

He drew her towards him and kissed her on

her forehead. His was no passionate love-making. He was too self-centred for any impulsive abandon of feeling, and though his face was all aglow with triumph and real affection, there was nothing divine about him, even in this sublime moment. It is the very greatest test of a man's nature, the manner with which he accepts his fate from a woman's hands, be it acceptance or rejection, very few can preserve an artificial exterior at such moments, for however shallow the nature or however base the motives which prompt an offer of marriage, every one must feel that it is at least one of the most important crises of life that is being decided, and a question answered which most materially affects the individual happiness or misery of him who puts it.

Dudley's behaviour throughout was thoroughly characteristic of the man. He felt no rush of impetuous devotion, no self-forgetful enthusiasm for his future wife. He was perfectly satisfied with his own choice, and applauded the wife which Sir Dudley Ross was going to present to society. She was the stake he had played for, he had won her, and that was sufficient. He would make an irreproachable husband, and people should say that neither of them had thrown themselves away.

This was his *victory*.

CHAPTER XII.

'THE CALM WHICH PRECEDES A STORM.'

DOLLY did not sleep much that night. When she left her cousin, she went up to her own room, and drawing up the blind, she seated herself by the window and gazed out on the moonlit scene below.

All hers now! that beautiful park and the wood beyond, and the dear little farm nestling amongst the trees; she was going to be 'Mistress of all she surveyed.' How much she would be able to do for the tenants and the poor people in the village, and how glad her boys would be that she was going to live amongst them always! there was great peace and rest in her soul as she dwelt on this side of the picture, and as she raised her eyes to the sky and saw the stars shining, clear and bright, she could almost fancy Bruce's face was looking down at her from amongst them, she had such a strong conviction now that he was dead, and, be-

lieving this of him, she could so readily forgive his seeming faithlessness, for we none of us bear ill-will to the dead, and we cast a halo over them when they are gone, which shines, perhaps, all the brighter around them for having been dimmed during their lifetime by the dark thoughts we have had towards them.

It was the very impossibility of doubting Bruce, though all appearances were against him, that made Dolly, believe he was dead. Death, the impassable barrier, was between them, she felt sure, or he would never have kept silence all this long while, and she could retain her love for him through all her married life with Dudley in a way that would be not only wrong, but impossible, had Bruce been still alive, though faithless. In the one case she would have the unspeakable comfort of knowing that his spirit was in communion with hers, and was cognisant of her fidelity to him; while, on the other, it would be shipwreck to both of them to learn such a truth when it was too late to retrieve their steps, and Dolly could scarcely refrain from ejaculating,—

'I pray that he *is* dead.'

She came down next morning very quiet and calm, kissed her mother as usual and declared she was 'much better,' and shook hands with Dudley. She was very silent all breakfast time and scarcely ate anything. Her mother saw that something had happened, but had not had any opportunity of finding out

what the result of her nephew's interview of the night before had been, so she assented, with great alacrity, to his request presently to be allowed to have a few words with her before he went out.

About half-an-hour afterwards Mrs Ross came rapidly upstairs, and finding Dolly in the morning-room watering some of the ferns, she rushed at her and embraced her with the greatest effusion—spilling all the water in her eagerness and disconcerting Dolly considerably.

'Dudley has told me the great news, darling, and you have made me the happiest and proudest mother in England.'

'That is highly satisfactory, mamma,' replied the daughter quietly; 'I supposed you would be glad. It is very kind of Dudley to care for me.' And then with a sigh of weariness she turned away and busied herself with the plants again.

Mrs Ross was taken completely aback by Dolly's coldness and utter want of enthusiasm; but then her daughter always had puzzled her, and she was wont to use an expression which I have noticed is a very favourite one with many mothers who fail to understand their daughters.

'She is not in the least like a child of mine!' What such a person would have been like always remains a hidden mystery, and the expression conveys about as much meaning as a similar one, She is not in the least like a

mother of mine,' would in coming from the lips of a daughter. It is ridiculous to suppose that there can be certain existing recipes for daughters, like cooking recipes for puddings. The creation of a woman's nature does not rest with the mother, and though the training has a great deal to do with the after development of the character, it can only be *training* after all in the case of human beings, and not forcing into a certain shape of mould as in the case of the pudding; and yet how many mothers lament over their girls as 'failures,' in the same way that cooks lament if their jellies refuse to set or their cakes refuse to rise properly; I am inclined to think the cooks are the more honest of the two, for they acknowledge the fault to lie on *their* side, while the mothers think *they* are immaculate!

Dudley came in a few moments after, and throwing his arm lightly round Dolly's shoulders, asked her to come out for a little walk with him.

'Certainly, if you wish it,' she said.

'Not if you are tired dear,' he added gently.

'Oh, no, thank you Dudley,' she replied quickly, and ran upstairs immediately to put on her things.

They stayed out about an hour, and when they came in Dolly went to find her mother.

'Dudley wishes to be married here this day fortnight, mamma,' she began at once. 'We both hate a long engagement, and we have

nothing to wait for, so he proposes that you and I should go up to London on Monday to an hotel just to order my wedding dress and a few other things. I suppose Mrs Bird can make me what I want in ten days? I shall get a travelling dress from a tailor's, and as I shall be abroad two or three months, I needn't take many evening dresses or other paraphernalia. We are to spend our honeymoon in London, so whatever I find I am likely to want I can get then.'

So that day fortnight Dudley made Dorothea Ross his 'wedded wife, to have and to hold for better for worse,' and they went straight up to London after the quiet wedding, and took up their temporary abode at the Grosvenor Hotel, 'so as to be on the spot,' as they said, when they started for the Continent.

Dudley was really very good to his little wife all that week. He was much more gentle than usual, and seemed genuinely glad to take care of her and look after her. He did love her truly, after his own selfish fashion. She was very pretty, and well turned out; and he liked to feel people noticing her as she walked by his side in the street. He loved her, certainly, more than his favourite mare, but it was a question of degree and not quality. They were both his own lawful acquisitions, and the fame of both was due to his own credit in acquiring them. The one was the perfect mare belonging to Sir Dudley Ross, the other

was the sweet, lovely wife belonging to the same gentleman. His nature was so self-centred that he could not take interest in people or things which had no connection with himself. He cared for everything and everybody only so far as they affected himself; and, except in rare instances, he seldom took a dislike to any one, unless they had in some way injured him, or come across his path in an obnoxious way. Then, as we have seen, he would stoop to any baseness, and outrage every principle of honour, in order to rid himself of the obstacle.

He did not receive very cordial letters from his family upon his marriage. The Dowager Lady Ross did not at all like to be supplanted by her little niece, and Janet and Constance also did not relish the idea that their much-disparaged cousin had ousted them from their own country house. After a while they all became more philosophical, however, and consoled themselves with the thought that, after all, it would only have been a matter of time, for Dudley had long been on what sailors call 'the marrying tack,' and it would, on the whole, be better to have so very harmless and unformidable a sister-in-law as Dolly would be, than a stiff, fashionable London woman for their relation.

Dolly's marriage vow did not oppress her much during her honeymoon. Dudley had never asked for her love; he did not want to

be 'cherished' either; and it was no very difficult matter to obey as yet. All he exacted of her was that she should always be cheerful and ready to go out with him whenever he wanted her, and never to oppose his choice when they were shopping. They spent most of their time in shops choosing furniture for Dolly's rooms at the manor house, that she would occupy when they returned from their foreign tour. She felt no particular interest in anything, so she never objected to what her husband chose, but what bored her most were the hours he would spend in old curiosity shops in dirty little back streets, pulling out all sorts of old bits of china and tapestry, and odds and ends of antiques, which Dolly knew absolutely nothing about, and cared for still less. He tried to teach her the respective values of the different articles he bought, but she generally got tired of them before they became hers, as Dudley spent so much time bargaining with the dealer, and she could not help secretly rejoicing on one or two occasions when her husband was vanquished over some particularly rare and desperately hideous piece of china, and had to give it up.

The greatest discussion they had was about Dudley's wedding present to his wife. He offered to give her anything she liked to choose, and had, of course, imagined that, like all women, she would choose diamonds. When, therefore, Dolly begged for a grand Erard piano

he was much disappointed, and at first would not hear of it. He was utterly unmusical, though he professed to enjoy the opera as much as any one, but he could not whistle anything in tune, and his sisters always declared he did not know 'God save the Queen' from 'Pop goes the Weasel.' So he grudged spending so large a sum on a piano which it would give him no pleasure to listen to. Diamonds or any jewels would repay him by enhancing the beauty of his wife who wore them; or had she chosen lace, that would likewise have been a satisfaction to him, worn by his wife. But a mere piece of furniture! His selfishness stood in the way of his acceding readily to her request, and he was much put out by her obstinate refusal to express any other wishes.

He did not give up the conquest, however, for some time, and one day as they were walking down Bond Street he suddenly made her turn into one of the largest jeweller's shops with him, on a pretext of wishing to see the diamonds which some famous princess had just bought there; and, after Dolly had admired them and heard all their history, he made the jeweller show them some smaller diamond *parures,* and in the man's hearing he turned to his wife and said, 'You must choose to-day what I am to give you.'

Quietly and firmly she replied,—

'Thank you, Dudley, but I don't wish for

jewellery. You know I don't care to wear it, and I have that diamond pendant you gave me on my wedding-day. I should not wish for any other.'

'Nonsense,' he answered sharply, 'as Lady Ross you must have decent jewels, and as my wife I shall request you to wear them.'

The jeweller was astonished at his fair customer. It was singularly rare that a lady ever came into his shop and refused the offer of her choice of jewels, and his professional pride was hurt at her rejection of his loveliest selection of lockets, pendants, stars, and necklaces. Surely this person calling herself 'Lady Ross' could not be a *lady*, or she would know the value of such goods too well to despise them.

Eventually a set of rubies and diamonds was reluctantly chosen by Dolly, and, with a gesture of disgust she pushed the others away from her, and said wearily,—

'Wont that do now? I am so tired, Dudley.'

And so the contest ended, and Dudley was, as usual, the winner.

They intended starting abroad on Saturday, and on Friday Mrs Ross was to come up to see her daughter once more before she left England.

On Thursday morning, when Dolly came down to breakfast, she found two or three letters on her plate, and her husband, too, was

occupied with several apparently. He frowned as he read one of them, and said impatiently,—

'What a nuisance one's agent is. Here's this old Crooks bothering me again about those cottages on the Holme estate, Dolly, and he wants me to go down and see about it before I start. I don't like leaving you, and yet I ought to go, I suppose. I could be back in time for dinner, you know, if I went by the 10.15 train. Shall you mind if I do?'

'Oh, no,' she answered readily. I 'shall be very happy—I mean I shall be all right by myself, thank you, Dudley. I shall go out for a drive this afternoon, and see why they have not sent our books that we bought yesterday, and there are several things I can do to-day without you.'

'Look at that, Dolly,' he said, interrupting her, and handing her a little square, scented note to read; 'it's from Lady Redfern, a very old friend of mine.'

She took it and read,—

'My dear Sir Dudley,—I could hardly believe my eyes when I read the announcement of your marriage the other day in the *Times;* but Captain Dolby, whom I met this morning in the Row, tells me you are not only married, but are actually staying in London. So I send you this hasty note to ask you to bring your wife to dine with us on Friday at eight o'clock, I am so anxious to see her

and to hear all about you, for you know I am always your most sincere friend,

'PHYLLIS REDFERN.'

'I suppose we had better go, Dolly?' he asked, when she had finished reading the note.

'As you like,' she replied. 'I should have begged off if mamma had been coming, as she intended; but I have had a few lines from her just now to say that she is afraid she will not be able to manage the journey in this cold weather. Who was Lady Redfern? I never heard you speak of her, and yet she seems to be very friendly with you.'

'Oh, she and I are very old allies. Haven't I ever mentioned her to you? That is because you see you have put the recollection of every other woman out of my head. I don't suppose you will care for her much, but she is a good-natured little woman, and well-meaning after her kind. I think she will be very civil to you as my wife. Her husband is a K.C.B., so she won't be jealous of you now. You had better write and accept her invitation—or I will. She wrote to me, so it will look strange if you answer it. She is a woman who notices those sort of things, and, for heaven's sake, Dolly, look your best, and wear those new ornaments I gave you, and don't let her patronise you. I couldn't stand it from *Phyllis*—but I must dash off this note, and then catch

my train. Good-bye, dear, take care of yourself, and expect me back in time for dinner. I am game for a theatre to-night, if you like to go and take the tickets to-day, for any piece you wish to see. Your love to your mother, I suppose. Good-bye, good-bye.'

And giving her a hurried kiss he rushed off, leaving her to enjoy one whole day untroubled by his wearisome attentions and dull, selfish talk, and she was almost frightened at the undisguised feeling of relief which came over her as she realised his absence.

And they had only been married a week!

CHAPTER XIII.

'EIN WENIG ZU SPÄT IST' VIEL ZU SPÄT.'

ABOUT twoo'clock Lady Ross received a slight shock by the entry of the waiter with a telegram in his hand. Immediately the thought flashed across her, 'Dudley has been killed in a railway accident!' White with fear, she opened the yellow envelope with trembling fingers, and, with a sigh of relief, read the following message :—

'Send by post immediately Crooks' letter and plans, which are in blue envelope in my secretary, Eaton Square. Key on bunch in dressing-bag. Am detained here till to-morrow afternoon.'

So that was all! How foolish she was to be frightened at nothing. She would go upstairs at once and find the key, and walk over to Eaton Square without delay to execute her husband's request.

She had to ring four or five times before the door was answered, however, and at last a

very dirty old face appeared peering round the door, and a mumbling voice inquired, 'Who was ringing as if to break the bell?'

'I am Lady Dudley Ross, and want to come in to fetch something, please,' answered Dolly, smiling at the old woman's evident suspicion of her.

'Oh, I beg your pardon, mum—miss—*my lady*, I mean. Pray walk in, but the place is in a rare muddle, and your ladyship won't find a chair fit to sit down upon.' With much shuffling and scraping, the old person welcomed her young mistress; and, going to the hall table, she pulled a pile of letters out of a drawer and gave them to Lady Ross, muttering something about 'not having no address where to send the letters to, so she had kept them against any one coming for them.'

Dolly took them and proceeded to look through them, in order to sort her mother's and sisters-in-law's, and forward those that were not evidently circulars. Half-way through the pile she stopped and almost dropped the whole lot. What met her eye? It was a letter addressed to—

'Miss Dorothea Ross,
c/o Sir Dudley Ross, Bart.,
Eaton Square,
London,'

and bearing the post-mark of Melbourne. The handwriting was but too well known, and the sight of it made her turn sick, and

fear to open the envelope. So, with a strong effort, she thrust it into her pocket, and hurriedly glancing through the rest of the letters, she proceeded to the study, where the old woman followed her, dusted a chair for her, and opened one of the shutters so as to let in a little light and enable her to search in the secretary for what she had come to find.

There were several blue envelopes, and more than one in the same handwriting, so she had to look them over to find the right one containing the plans her husband had mentioned. Here it was at last. Hastily assuring herself that she had made no mistake, she locked up the secretary again, and thanking her old friend for her assistance, she bade her good-day, and hurried home as fast as she could, with but one thought in her mind—to despatch Dudley's letter, and then to sit down and face the contents of that which seemed now to be burning her pocket. She could not find an envelope large enough to hold Crooks' plans, folded as they were, so she had to take them out and refold them ; which done, she addressed the packet, and ringing the bell, she desired the servant to take it at once to the post. When he had left the room, she noticed a piece of paper, as she thought, lying on the floor, and stooping to pick it up, found it was a letter addressed to herself in the same handwriting as her other. What strange fate had overtaken her to-day ? She felt as if she was walking in her sleep, and

that this was a night-mare that was pursuing her. How could this second letter have come there? It must have dropped out of the blue envelope; and yet how was that possible? She tore it open without further delay, seeing that it was addressed, as the other had been, to 'Miss Dorothea Ross,' and as she read she remained spell-bound. Her eyes dilated with horror as she realised the truth of Bruce's fidelity to her, but for the first few seconds she did not take in the whole situation.

This letter had been given to her *husband* to deliver to her the very day before he had joined them at Balmacarra, and how well Dolly remembered now his words in answer to her question whether Bruce had sent her no message.

'None, my poor child. I wish he had!'

Such base treachery was almost beyond her comprehension. It seemed like a dreadful dream such as one reads of in novels, and she could not believe she was really awake and reading a page out of her own history. The loving, trustful words cut her to the quick, and she could only repeat over and over again to herself in a sort of moaning voice,—

'And I was faithless!'

Presently she recollected the other letter, and, drawing it out of her pocket she opened it, and the words seemed to burn her very eyes.

'My own little Dolly,' it began. 'The cloud which seemed to hang over me is clearing

away, and I shall soon be free to return to England and *you*. The separation has been a long one to me, but it has made me prize you more highly than ever, darling, and it will draw us all the closer together when we know that henceforth nothing but death need part us again. I long for a sight of you, my little bright angel, but my rest and my glory is in feeling that you trust me through all this weary time of waiting, for without this implicit belief in you, Dolly, life would be unbearable.

'I shall look for a letter from you at Bombay, where I shall be, I hope, the last week in March. Write to the Byculla Club and tell me all that you have been doing and thinking since our parting. Your very handwriting will cheer me and make me feel the distance between us less. I am afraid I am sadly impatient of this trial, dear, and I know you are bearing it far more bravely than I. I pray daily that I may become more worthy of you, for I have done so little to deserve you.—I am, for ever and ever, your loving BRUCE.'

Dolly often wondered afterwards how she kept her reason after having received this letter. She was not conscious of anything, save a sort of numb feeling all over her when she had finished reading it. She tried to laugh and think it was a hoax, a sham, a dream; but her voice seemed to have left her, her hand shook, and her whole frame trembled so she could hardly keep her seat. What had she done?

She laid her head back in her chair and tried to collect her thoughts and understand what it all meant, and by degrees, slowly, as if it was gradually coming out of her brain and taking shape before her eyes, she saw the whole truth, and with the awakening seemed to return all the old vigour and strength and independence which had characterised her before she had received the shock of her lover's supposed faithlessness. She sprung up from her chair, and pacing up and down the room, she wrung her hands in anguish, and cried,—

'I have been deceived, wickedly betrayed, and it is my husband who is the guilty one. Oh, Bruce, Bruce! come back and save me. I cannot bear my life without you. I will go to you at once, and leave him who has wrecked my life. Nothing can really keep me from you, and I am yours, and yours only. Oh, why did I not get this letter a week earlier? It would have been easy to manage then; now, Dudley will make a fuss. But Dudley, who is he to keep me from Bruce?'

But by-and-by the wild incoherent longings subsided, and Dolly began to see dimly the other side of the picture, and the real future which lay before her.

A letter lying on her table addressed to 'Lady Ross' recalled her to herself first. Yes! that was her name now. She was Dolly Ross still, 'twas true, but with a difference—the Dolly Ross that Bruce had written to was not

the girl that received his letter. The one was a creature of the past, the other was the living wife of Sir Dudley Ross, and as this truth forced itself more and more upon her mind, she thought less of her own misery and more of the terrible shock it would be to Bruce when he discovered the evil fate which had overtaken them both; and Dolly literally shivered when she thought of that noble trust betrayed, that strong, pure faith destroyed, and that passionate, faithful love unrequited. And it was that little, narrow band of gold round her own finger which was the cause of all their future (and her present) misery. But for that she would now have been free to write a true and loving reply to his letters; in a month or two all would have been the brightest sunshine for both of them, and, to quote his own words, 'nothing but death need ever part them.'

All that she had suffered before seemed nothing to the present torture—if only she could break the news gently to Bruce, or soften to him in some way the dreadful blow. The agony she had experienced before in her own disappointment was doubly intensified now by the realisation of what Bruce would have to go through yet, and the cup of her sorrow, which she had thought was full, now seemed to be overflowing.

Truly she had not looked for so terrible a day when her husband had left her in the morning! And how little he guessed

of what had happened during his short absence!

It had quite escaped his memory that he had put Jefferies's letter to Dolly inside Crooks' envelope on that journey to Scotland, nor of course could he have the faintest idea that a second letter would be sent to his care for Dolly, or he would probably have guarded against such a possibility, and provided for the contingency. As it was, he praised his little wife for her ready compliance with his request; and, having settled his business satisfactorily, he returned to town on Friday afternoon fully expecting to see Dolly waiting for him in their own sitting-room. She was not there, however, and he went to her bedroom to find her. To his utter astonishment, upon his knocking at the door, she flung it wide open and stood before him, looking as he had never seen her before, white and despairing and almost wild.

'Good heavens, child! what is the matter?' he exclaimed, as he put out his arm to embrace her.

She drew back hastily from him, and said imperiously,—

'Come in and shut the door, please.'

He obeyed, with a sudden fear seizing him that his wife had gone mad. Her next words altered his demeanour and put him on his mettle.

'I have discovered the truth, Dudley,' she said, perfectly calm, 'and no words can fitly

express my contempt for you, and my utter loathing of myself for having married you. You call yourself *a man*, and you have sworn to love and protect me, a defenceless girl; but you undertook that vow with a stain upon your hands; and you expect me to respect you and fulfil my vow in return! It is, indeed, a bitter fate which compels me to live with a man to whom honour is an unknown virtue; and I pray to God to take my life as soon as possible, that I may escape such an existence.'

'Really, you are quite theatrical, my dear,' replied Dudley, with a sneer; 'those are pleasant words for a husband to hear from his wife after their first separation. I am quite at a loss for an explanation of their meaning.'

For an instant she hoped that perhaps, after all, he was innocent towards her, and that she had wronged him in her bitter thoughts against him. She went to the dressing-table, and taking out Bruce's first note, held it towards her husband, watching his face narrowly as she spoke again,—

'Was that not given to you on the —th September, to deliver to me; and what is your excuse for having kept it back, and represented the conduct of Mr Jefferies falsely to me?'

In a second Dudley saw what had happened —she had found out the letter when looking for Crooks' plans in his secretary. What a fool he had been to allow her such an oppor-

tunity! The game was up now; so he thought it best to make no defence, but appeal to her feelings, and plead his love for her as his excuse.

'I loved you so, Dolly,' he said, 'and I knew you would never be mine while another man stood in my way.'

'And you thought you would win me by treachery,' she interrupted, scornfully.

'Many women would feel flattered at a man's love for her being strong enough to overpower all his feelings of honour. Does such love not touch you, Dolly?'

> 'I could not love thee, dear, so much,
> Loved I not honour more,'

were the lines which came into Dolly's mind as he spoke, but she did not quote them aloud.

'No,' she answered bitterly, 'you only insult me by imagining that I was such a woman as you speak of. No love is worth having at the sacrifice of a man's *manhood*, and you have, indeed, mistaken your wife if you think she glories in her conquest. Is it *nothing* to you,' she pursued more vehemently, 'that your happiness has been bought by the life-long suffering of another? and is it not a bitter thought to you that your wife will always be pointed out as the woman who behaved shamefully to one of the best men that ever lived? Can you feel proud of me when you know I shall be called a "jilt?" Oh, Dudley, how can you degrade such a noble thing as love by

telling me that was your motive for acting as you have done?'

He remained perfectly calm and cool while she talked, and, when she finished, said quietly,—

'You are very excited, my dear child, and don't know what you are saying. Your ideas are very romantic and Quixotic, as I have often told you, and if you can't believe I love you because I am not sentimental and poetical, like —' Jefferies, he was going to add, but stopped, seeing a sudden flash of anger come into her eyes—'like some men,' he said instead, 'I can't really stay here all day trying to prove it by argument. As for your notion that the world will point the finger of scorn at you for having changed your mind and married eligibly instead of miserably, I assure you, Dolly, the world is too wise for that, and you will get more praise than blame, especially as it is not in the least likely your private history will ever be known to a single person out of all the society in which you will find yourself when you take your place in it as Lady Ross. And I would not be too sure of Jefferies's broken heart either, if I were you,' he added by way of a parting shot. 'Men get over their love affairs more easily than women like to believe, and I daresay he will console himself with some one more of his own class. One thing you forget, Dolly,' he remarked severely, 'and it is necessary for me to remind you, that Jefferies's family

matters were the real obstacle to your marriage with him, and that I, as your cousin and your guardian, was bound to save you from such a marriage. Had I given you that letter which you have now obtained for yourself, it would not have made any difference in the fact that your mother, as well as I, would *never* have consented to the match. I will not repeat the details that I gave your mother in Scotland of Jefferies's history, but I think even you are woman of the world enough to know that your marriage was an utter impossibility.'

'That history was false, Dudley,' Dolly replied firmly. 'I have received a letter—I found it waiting for me at Eaton Square yesterday too—from Mr Jefferies, the first sentence of which I will read to you. He has been cruelly wronged, and if you are a gentleman you will own it to him, and apologise for your share in it.'

Dudley put his lips together and gave a sort of whistle.

'Another letter! Dear me you must have had quite a day of surprises yesterday. As you are a married woman, and cannot receive love-letters now, perhaps you will be good enough to hand over that second epistle from Jefferies.'

Dolly looked at him steadily in the face, while, by way of reply, she took her letter and tore it in small pieces before him. These she held out to him without a word, and

she felt she had got the best of it that time.

He was too angry to speak, so, without deigning to look at her, he turned on his heel and left the room, conscious only of having been beaten in the end after all by his girlish wife, and a vague apprehension seizing him that he had not so completely conquered her by marrying her as he thought, many battles would have to be fought yet before he could say he had subdued her high spirit and made her more his own moulding.

Dolly utterly refused to dine out that night. She could plead a headache in all sincerity, and really looked so ill and wretched, that Dudley did not wish her to be seen thus on her honeymoon. So he allowed her to send her excuses to Lady Redfern, and he went alone to dinner, was made a great fuss with by his hostess, and soothed by his host's good wine into a better humour.

A pretty woman to talk to during dinner, a glass of '64 claret afterwards, and a good cigar to follow! What man can remain miserable or bad tempered after such a triple combination? Perhaps the fiends which possess men are not so wicked as those which enter women sometimes, for certain it is that either of the above-quoted consolations will exorcise the evil spirit in a man, while tears, the proverbial remedy and relief for all feminine woes, are one of the only resources left to the weaker sex, and even they are in most cases quite powerless to effect any

cure at all. *Tracts* and *tea* are the other two consolations offered to women, and I think they are privileges which no man will envy, nor will he blame the sex for wishing to exchange, in this instance at least, some of its privileges for its *Rights*.

CHAPTER XIV.

FAMILY INTRODUCTIONS.

AND how had Bruce spent these five months away from England? His first experiences had not been very propitious. The steamer he sailed in broke down between Malta and Port Said, and had to be towed back into Malta, and the unfortunate Australia-bound passengers had to wait there for a fortnight until the next mail steamer passed to take them on to their destination. So Bruce did not reach Melbourne till the last week in November, greatly to his disgust, for he was chafing terribly at the delay. He knew Dolly could not write to him until he sent her his address, and now he could not possibly hear from her for another two months at least—that would be the end of February! How could he wait all that time longer without hearing a single word from her? He was strongly tempted to telegraph to her, but the bitter remembrance of the errand on which he had come all this long wearisome way recalled

his better judgment, and he recollected that perhaps after all his next letter to Dolly might have to be a final farewell. She had those words of his, meanwhile, to rest upon that he had written and sent her by Sir Dudley. He felt sure she was true to him, and that nothing could come between them during their separation.

He took steps immediately on landing to discover his father, and went at once to the house corresponding to his own banking firm in London, thinking that, as Mr Jefferies sent his quarterly remittances so regularly through them, they would know his address. He was wofully disappointed, however, to receive a polite note from the head partner of the bank one morning to the effect that after due inquiry it was found that Mr Jefferies senior had left Melbourne some three weeks ago, and that he was not expected to return until the 1st of January; as he had left no address with his landlord either, it was not possible to inform him of his son's arrival meantime.

So there was nothing for it for Bruce but to wait patiently in Melbourne till the first of the year, and he employed his time as best he could seeing the sights of the place, using the letters of introduction which Dr Bury had given him to several of the medical profession; for Bruce made up his mind that if he should be forced to cut the ties which bound him to England, he would spend the rest of

his life out in Australia or India, and would devote the whole of his attention to the diseases peculiar to tropical climates, and strive to forget his own sorrow in alleviating the sufferings of his fellow-men.

Strong and resolute though he was, and determined not to be conquered by circumstances however trying, it was, notwithstanding, a sore trial of his patience to be forced to wait in comparative idleness for his father's return, and it was with feelings of dread rather than longing that he anticipated their first interview. The 1st of January came and went, and still no tidings of Mr Jefferies; but on the morning of the 3d, a note was brought to Bruce from the head clerk of the bank saying that Mr Jefferies had arrived, and had requested that his son might be told of his arrival and invited to go and see him as soon as he chose.

'Strange!' thought Bruce, 'that my father does not write to me himself; but I will go without delay and learn my fate,' and in another half-hour he found himself in the presence of his unknown father.

There was a great resemblance between the two; the elder man was grey and worn, of course, in comparison to the younger, but the build of the two was alike, and both had tall, upright figures, broad shoulders, and dark hair and beard. Here the likeness ceased, their expressions were totally different, and instead of the frank fearless, brown eyes of his son, Mr Jefferies

had small, sharp, grey eyes, which always seemed half-closed notwithstanding their sharp twinkle; and though the mouths of both men were partially covered by moustache and beard, the expression was marvellously different, that of quiet determination combined with a sweetness of disposition in the one case, and cynicism, obstinacy, and sensuality unmistakably marked in the other.

When Bruce entered the room, his father was sitting at his writing-table mending a pen, and, retaining his seat, he held out his left hand to his son and motioned him to a chair.

'So you are my son, are you?' were his first words, spoken in cold measured tones and with a sharp scrutinising glance at his visitor.

'I am sir,' was Bruce's quiet answer.

'And to what unaccountable fact am I indebted for the honour of this visit, may I ask?'

'Father, I have come to you to learn my own history. I know nothing of my early life before I was five years old. I have made the best use I could of my education. I have very good prospects in London, and am engaged to be married to a young lady of good family, and I have come all this way to ask you to tell me my own history before I settle down to a married life in London.'

Bruce was astonished at his own words. How cold, how mercenary he had made himself appear, and he had meant to say so much more and in such a different fashion; but his

father's manner chilled him the instant he spoke. It would be impossible to show any impulsive warmth of affection or display the smallest amount of sentiment with a man who looked at him narrowly out of half-shut eyes while he was speaking, and then, as soon as he had finished, went on mending his pen and appearing engrossed in the occupation.

At last he laid down his knife and pen, and, getting up from his chair, walked towards a door opposite to that by which Bruce had entered, and opening it, called out,—

'Cynthia!'

A sprightly voice answered,—

'Yes, Tom, I am coming.'

And in another second a little fairy-like figure appeared in the doorway, and Mr Jefferies drew her forward, saying,—

'I want to introduce you to my son, Cynthia. Bruce, this is my wife, your step-mother.'

'Your *third* wife, Tom, you ought to have said,' answered the little woman pertly.

'Ah, well, it doesn't matter, you little baby,' was her husband's gracious reply, 'he won't like you the less for being my third wife. Shall you Bruce, eh?'

Bruce felt rather embarrassed at this introduction, and was vexed at it. How could he talk business with a woman in the room, and ask his own mother's history with her second successor present? He could not understand his father's motive for calling her into the room

before he had answered any of his questions, and he felt inclined to take his leave and say he would call again when his father was at leisure. His vexation made him shy and awkward, and his step-mother at once jumped to the foolish conclusion that he did not like her for having married Mr Jefferies. So she turned to her husband with a pouting face and said, in a childish, spoilt sort of way,—

'He doesn't want to be friends with me, Tom. I will go away.'

Her speech roused Jefferies to recollect his manner, and, coming forward, he held out his hand and said very courteously,—

'You are quite mistaken, Mrs Jefferies. I hope we shall be great friends; and I beg your pardon for my seeming bad manners.'

She was mollified in an instant, and, putting up her pretty little baby face to his, said,—

'Then, we will make friends directly. You are my big son, you know.'

And Bruce bent down and kissed her forehead without a word.

But his question remained unanswered; and so it went on for days and days, till Bruce began to despair of ever getting his father to consent to a serious talk. He never saw him alone. Cynthia was always there, playing about like a kitten, or the child that she was, and whenever her step-son proposed that he and his father should take a walk together, or

a ride, she would immediately put on such a look of misery and woe that her husband invariably gave way and let her come too ; so it generally ended in Bruce feeling very much in the way, and leaving them earlier than he had intended. But one morning when he went round, as usual, after breakfast, to his father's house, he found his step-mother had gone to the docks with her own brother to see a friend off to England, and Mr Jefferies was sitting alone in his study smoking. 'Now is my time,' thought Bruce, and, in desperation, he plunged at once into his subject and asked his father point-blank the question that had been trembling on his lips ever since their meeting, but which Cynthia's presence had always rendered it impossible for him to put into words. Mr Jefferies answered his son by asking another question,—

'Who put such a notion into your head?'

'Mrs Clark,' was the brief reply.

'And you started off to the antipodes at the mere suggestion of an old woman like that? Why did you not refuse to believe any flaw in your mother's history, and let your life slide on as peacefully and as prosperously as apparently it would have done if you had not been so Quixotic as to come rushing out here to rake up a past which had better be forgotten?'

This was said half bitterly and half reproachfully ; but Bruce was not to be put off by this phase of his father's manner, and taking a

letter out of his pocket, he placed it in Mr Jefferies's hand, saying,—

'That was the evidence I had of the truth of Mrs Clark's story; and I am gentleman enough to wish to sift the matter to the bottom before I make any girl my wife. You will greatly oblige me, father, by giving me as simple and as direct an answer to my inquiries as you can.'

The letter which was supposed to have been written by Mrs Jefferies—*née* Lizzie de Brousa—excited Mr Jefferies considerably. He stared at it and turned it about, and read and re-read it until his son wondered what he could find so wonderful in it.

'It's a —— forgery, Bruce!' he broke out at last. 'Your mother never wrote that letter, and Mrs Clark never thought she had either. She's a devil of a woman, Mrs Clark is, and you were a mighty fool ever to have gone near her. Lizzie was my wife a year or more before you were born, and Mrs Clark wrote to me herself about it. Stay, I have the letter somewhere—I will find it.' And rushing to a black tin box he rummaged amongst some very old papers and letters, and in course of time came upon one which he tore out of its envelope and gave to his son to read.

'There,' he resumed, 'read that! I was a brute, I know, to leave that poor little thing to die by herself; and you hate me, no doubt, for not caring more for you as a child. But by

heaven, Bruce, I am sorry for it, and there's my hand.'

The man was thoroughly roused now for once, and the old English characteristics came out in him and made him manly and not ashamed to own his past wrong-doing. Bruce honoured him for it, and shook his hand warmly.

'It is I who have to beg your pardon, sir,' he replied, 'for having wronged you even in thought; and I hope you will forgive my eagerness to learn the truth, and will believe that nothing but so apparently conclusive a piece of evidence as that forged letter could have made me doubt the integrity of your actions with regard to my poor mother. I have learnt the truth now, father, and I will return to England, grateful with all my heart to you for your kindness, and glad to have made your wife's acquaintance.'

This last sentence was added as the door opened, and Madame Cynthia came skipping into the room.

'Oh, how tragical you both look!' she exclaimed, with a merry laugh; 'what have you been rummaging out. Tom, come here and cheer me up. I am dreadfully low after seeing those dear creatures go off to England. When *are* you going to take me there?'

'Tom,' always obedient to his little plaything, shut down the old tin box with a half sigh, and patting her softly on the cheek, said, with a return of his usual quiet manner,—

'Some day, little one, we will go and pay this big son of mine a visit, if he will have us.'

'Gladly!' exclaimed Bruce, readily. 'You must keep to your promise, father, and bring Mrs Jefferies over, and I will show her the sights of London, and I will introduce you both to my *wife* then. She will, I know, welcome you as warmly as I shall, and she will like you to feel that our home is yours too, at any time.'

'What is your wife like, Bruce?' asked Cynthia.

'She isn't my wife yet, Mrs Jefferies, but I hope to make her so, as soon as I can, after I get to London. I don't quite know how to describe her. She is very small, and has brown eyes and reddish gold hair, and a bright complexion, and is—well, she is *lovely!*' he ended abruptly, and laughing as he did so.

'Is she clever and original, and stiff and starchy, like all English girls?'

'Clever and original, yes. Stiff and starchy, certainly not. She is very sweet and bright and full of sunshine. You could not help loving her.'

'How do you know? Did you ever try not to?'

'Oh, yes, I tried hard, and thought I had succeeded in almost disliking her for one whole day! but then, somehow, she tumbled up against me in the dark, and—oh, I don't know what it was, but we both regularly fell in love, I suppose, and there is an end of it.'

'That's what happened to you and me, Tom, isn't it?' said the little woman, turning to her husband, and they forthwith began to 'spoon' so decidedly that Bruce quickly took his leave and sped home as fast as he could, feeling as if the weight which had been lifted off his mind that morning had left him ten years younger, and several stone lighter. It was so joyful to feel that his trial was past, and that the cloud which had threatened to overshadow him altogether was now dispelled. He resolved instantly that he would write to Dolly, and sat down at once to do so, with what result we have already seen; for that letter was the one which Dolly received on the ill-fated day when she went to Eaton Square, in obedience to her husband's commands, and had learnt the miserable truth that she had been deceived and cruelly imposed upon.

Had the telephone then been invented, perhaps much misery might have been saved in Dolly's case, for when speech from mouth to mouth is possible, notwithstanding miles of distance between the two interlocutors, serious misunderstandings can scarcely arise, therefore I imagine fewer marriages will take place from motives of pique, and consequently fewer novels will be written, and let us hope the world will be more virtuous, and more full of happiness!

CHAPTER XV.

'SHIPWRECK!'

IT was at this period of her life, perhaps, more than at any other, that Dolly felt the great want of sympathy between herself and her mother. She longed inexpressibly for the advice of some one she could trust as to what course she should pursue with regard to acquainting Bruce Jefferies of the circumstances of her marriage. It was not a subject she could speak of to any outsider of course, nor had she any intimate friend at hand with whom she might consult and discuss the line of conduct she should adopt. As it was, she was left entirely to her own self, and many sleepless nights she passed in anxious meditation over the present situation, and each morning finding her more at sea than ever as to what she ought to do.

She resolved at first to write to Bruce and tell him the whole plain truth, and though it seemed easy enough to sit down and begin

with the account of her suffering and anxiety when first she heard of his departure, it was more difficult to explain how Dudley had kept back her letter, and how both he and her mother had insinuated cruel things about him. She got thus far in one of her attempts at a letter; but, then, how was she to proceed and tell him that of her own free will she had married the man who had blighted her life, and that by her own hand she had raised an impassable barrier between herself and Bruce!

What would all the asseverations on her part of her unchanging love avail now that she was not free to love any man but Dudley, her *husband?* Would it not be better for both of them that Bruce should believe her to have been faithless to himself? Would it not lessen his agony if she could so paint herself as to appear in his eyes utterly worthless of his love, and so change his love to hate? But though this was her strong conclusion, she had not the courage to write a cold, cruel letter. The love must be killed, but she could not write its death-warrant, and after numberless, fruitless attempts, she threw down her pen, and, tearing up all the several sheets of paper she had filled, resolved to give it up and leave Bruce to find out the truth for himself. But night and day he was her one thought, and she went through the keenest torture in anticipating his sufferings. What weariness her life was

to her! and how she longed to be allowed to die.

The change of air and scene, however, worked wonders for her in spite of all her mental anguish, and though she looked unspeakably wretched, and cared for none of the sights she saw on the Continent, still her cough rapidly left her, her cheeks lost their hollowness, and, as her husband remarked one morning when they had been a month abroad, 'she looked almost her old self again.'

He was wise enough not to find fault with her low spirits. His conscience pricked him just a little whenever he looked at her large brown eyes, with their sad, weary expression, and he knew that she was strictly conscientious, and would do her utmost to be all he wished as his wife. He was right there. Dolly had almost an exaggerated idea of a wife's duty to her husband, and in her own case she felt it specially incumbent upon herself to be scrupulously careful not to let it become apparent how entirely at variance her heart was with her husband's. She felt she had wronged him in marrying him, and the only atonement she thought she could make for her act of perjury in vowing her marriage vow was in the strict performance of her wifely duties.

'I have made one man miserable, let me not do so to a second!' was her constant prayer, and it was this alone that prevented her from becoming utterly hard, bitter, and scornful

towards her husband, for after her discovery she could not respect his character nor value his love, the two things which often make a very good substitute in marriage for unity and sympathy.

. . . . . .

In the smoking-room of the Grande Hotel, Milan, a young man was seated at one of the writing-tables, apparently occupied over a letter; but his thoughts did not seem easy to put into words, and every now and then his eyes wandered away to the window opposite him, and his mind would be diverted for a few moments by the sight of the busy street and the novel scene which it presented to him. It was evident he was English from the cut of his clothes; but equally certain was it that he had not just arrived from Piccadilly, for his coat was shabby and travel-stained, and his hair was not cropped close after the fashion of young Englishmen and convicts.

So pre-occupied was he that he did not hear the door open, nor footsteps approach, and he jumped as if he had been shot when a hand came down on his shoulder, and a cheery voice behind him exclaimed,—

'Upon my word, Jefferies, you are a queer chap, here have you been writing away for the last hour, and missed the best dinner I have tasted for many a year, to say nothing of the conversation of the pleasantest woman in Europe.'

His friend laughed and replied,—

'My dear Mellor, you know neither dinner nor conversation are much in my line; but who was the lady?'

'Well, she is awfully pretty and sweet-looking, with reddish hair, brown eyes, and a lovely skin, and her name I discovered from a peep at the visitors' book after dinner is Lady Ross.'

'Oh! an old woman! I thought you said she was young,' rejoined the other.

'Old! by Jove, no, she is quite young, I should say. Why on earth should she be old, Jefferies; do you know her, then?'

'Oh, no! not if she is young; but I knew something of an old Lady Ross once,—at least, she was middle-aged, about sixty or so. This may be her daughter-in-law, possibly Sir Dudley Ross's wife.'

'Dudley Ross. Yes, that is his name, replied Mellor, 'and she spoke of him as Sir Dudley to the waiter. He is away at Venice, she said. How odd that you should know them. Perhaps you would like to speak to Lady Ross. I daresay she knows you by name if you are a friend of her husband's.'

'Oh, no! he is not exactly a friend of mine. At least, of course I don't mean he is anything else, but—in short, Mellor, he is first cousin to the girl I am engaged to, and I should like to see him, just to ask after her, for somehow her letters have miscarried, and I am a little

anxious for news of her; but I don't know his wife, and should not like to intrude myself upon her in his absence— Didn't you say something about the opera to-night? It must be time to start if we want good places, I should think. I know the "Scala" is never full, but still it is so large that, in order to hear well, one ought to go in good time for a place.'

'All right! I'm quite ready. Let's be off, then.' And so saying the two friends left the hotel.

Somehow an uncomfortable feeling stuck to Jefferies the whole time he was in the opera about his friend's description of Lady Ross. He had so exactly described Dolly! And yet it was so utterly and absolutely impossible that it could be she that he laughed fairly at his own folly for conceiving such a thought, and hated himself for allowing even so slight a doubt to enter his mind. Still he could not help asking Mellor suddenly in the middle of the ballet,—

'I say, you are quite sure it is *Lady* Ross, and not *Miss* Ross?'

Mellor stared for a moment, not understanding his friend's train of thought, and then, recollecting the interest Jefferies had in the Ross family, he replied heartily,—

'Oh, not a doubt of it. Her own words to the waiter, "My husband, I mean Sir Dudley, will not be home to dinner," as well as her

wedding ring make it an absolute certainty that she is "my lady." Don't worry yourself, old chap. Enjoy the music and get your money's worth.'

As the two young men approached the hotel on their return from the opera they saw a crowd gathered round the door, and hastening up to it, learnt that there had been a carriage accident. and a lady thrown out and carried into the hotel insensible. Jefferies, being a doctor, pushed his way through the excited knot of bystanders, and, meeting the hotel manager in the hall, offered his services, failing those of any other doctor, if, indeed the lady was in need of assistance.

'Monsieur is *vary* good,' replied the man. 'Ze maid she is vary stupide, and vill not zat. I send for ze clevare docteur in Milano, but if monsieur vill have ze kindness to follow me, I tink it vill be bettare for miladi to see him, for she vas completely turned upside down from ze carriage, and mon Dieu! she must be sick!'

Bruce followed the hotel-keeper upstairs and waited at the end of the passage while the maid was fetched and told of the arrival of a doctor. She was a bright, fresh-looking English girl, and looked immensely relieved on seeing that the doctor was one of her own countrymen, and no foreigner.

'Indeed, sir, I am sure her ladyship will be very grateful to you if you will come and see

her,' she said, addressing him. 'I can't bring her to, and yet I don't think she is very much hurt.'

'Let me see your mistress,' he answered briefly, and followed her down the passage, stopping at the door to ask one question—'What is her name?'

'Lady Ross, sir. Didn't you know? She went out for a drive, I with her, after dinner, and, as we turned the corner coming home, one of the horses shied, the coachman lashed it with his whip and frightened the other horse so that it turned sharp round, and the carriage tilted right up, and her ladyship was thrown out.'

'And did her head strike the curb do you think?'

'No, sir, I am sure it did not, for she fell on her face, and the marvel is that her arm wasn't broken; but you will see for yourself what injury she has received. I wish Sir Dudley hadn't gone away;' and opening the door they entered the room.

Dolly was lying on the bed, which was in a very dark corner of the apartment, and as there was only a small lamp burning in another corner, Bruce could distinguish nothing at first but her form. He bent down over her and took her hand to feel the pulse, and as he did so glanced at the still, motionless face. What met his eye—*this*, Lady Ross! *It was Dolly*—his Dolly. How came it to be thought

that she was Lady Ross? Mechanically he raised the little cold hand and looked at it. Yes, that was her hand, but what was that on her third finger? A plain gold ring? signifying what—'

But one thing—*marriage.*

Had Bruce been a whit less strong and resolute he might have done either of two things. He might have seized her in his arms in a frenzy of passion and brought her to by vehement cries of love, or he might have felt so utterly struck by his discovery that further contact with her was impossible, and instant flight the only resource.

But his sense of professional duty was as strong in him as his other instincts, and with a gigantic effort of will he put the thought of her identity away from his mind, and devoted his whole attention to investigating the case from a professional point of view. Felt her pulse, listened to her breathing, applied the stethoscope to her heart, and finally asked the maid to bring the light so that he might see further the extent of the accident. No bones were broken, that was speedily ascertained, but the prolonged insensibility and other symptoms led him to the conclusion that his patient had suffered a slight concussion of the brain, and would require very careful treatment.

'Go downstairs, please,' he said to the maid, 'and ask the hotel-keeper to give you a telegraph form. I will send for Sir Dudley.

Lady Ross is in no great danger, but still her husband ought to be with her, and he could arrive by mid-day to-morrow if sent for at once, and bring some ice with you. I see you have brandy here.'

The girl hastened to obey his request, and returned quickly with paper and ice.

Bruce took out his pencil and wrote the following message :—

'Come back at once. Lady Ross has had a slight accident ; no great cause for alarm.'

He then devoted himself to the administration of restoratives, doing everything with a calmness and deliberation which surprised himself, and which called forth the maid's warmest admiration. Her face fell very visibly when at last he turned to her and said,—

'I am afraid I must leave Lady Ross now. I will send for the Italian doctor at once, and give the case over to him ; but I have to start for England by the early train, and the sooner I put her into cleverer hands than mine the better,' and with a few parting injunctions and a resolute avoidance of his patient's face he left the room, refusing the grateful servant's urgent request that he would leave his name and address that her master might write and thank him, as she knew he would wish to do.

'I have only done what every Englishman would have done in my place,' was his brief reply.

He met the Italian doctor on the stairs, for,

in the first excitement of the commotion caused by an accident, some officious person had rushed off to find him, Bruce was therefore able, without further delay, to explain the case as he had found it, and, returning to Lady Ross's door, he softly called the maid out, and handing the doctor over to her, retired and went straight to his own room.

And now the strain was over; there was no further need for self-restraint, and the strong, pent-up feelings gave way. He threw himself into a chair, buried his head in his hands and sobbed like a child. He could not think; he could not speculate. He felt like a man who has lost everything he ever had, even the possession of his most sacred self; and shipwreck, indeed, was the word which best described his state. Bitter, hopeless shipwreck; for with his love for Dolly was bound up all that makes a man most manly, and when that was taken from him he felt as if nothing remained. It was as if a rock, on which he imagined himself to be standing, had suddenly been changed to sand and crumbled away from under his feet; the everlasting conviction, moreover, remained to him, that any other rock that he chose to trust in the same way might likewise turn to unstable sand, and that the only faith left to him henceforward was in the untrustworthiness of everything human.

'Why had Dolly not written?' was his bitter cry, as his thoughts began gradually to take

shape, and he saw more clearly what was the state of the case. Had she told him she had ceased to love him, or that their marriage was an impossibility from any reason that she deemed sufficient, he would have given her up with different feelings — he would then have prepared himself for the news of her marriage with another, and there would at least have been no misunderstanding between them, no broken faith or outraged love, and his intense devotion to her might have developed into a still greater feeling of worship as her memory faded into a beautiful dream of a past life.

But now! His idol was broken, and what he thought was gold had only been gilded clay after all. He had loved her for her purity, her child-like faith, her loving trust—in short, for her divine humanity—and now that he had been deceived in that part of her, what remained for him to cherish still? Only her womanhood, the love of which without the ennobling element lowers a man more than any other passion, and debases his whole nature.

Of such a love Bruce was incapable. Whatever he cared for he must believe in—faith and love were indissolubly connected in his mind, and when one vanished the other followed inevitably. His was far too chivalrous a nature for him to insult a woman with the offer of a mere sensual affection, and if she was not something to him far above the common level of

earth she was nothing to him. Any woman that he liked in ever so small a degree he believed in and reverenced, and to have entertained a doubt of her absolute purity and good faith, would have been to him a profanity.

Happy, indeed, is the man who can go down to his grave, grey headed, with this rare faith in woman's nature! Until the doctrine of original righteousness replaces the terrible old heresy of original sin, and is universally taught and believed in, we shall find the old saying true, that 'opinions produce actions;' for to believe a man or a woman capable of any act of wickedness is the first step towards the production of the act. In contradiction to such a theory, propound another—that every human being is endowed with a power of doing some good—and see whether such a belief does not create self-respect, and, in raising the individual, the community will be also raised, and the theory will become a fact.

Bruce was very thankful he had decided not to stay longer than that night in Milan. He felt it would have been impossible for him to remain in that hotel. He was, moreover, incapable of further self-control, and this would have to be practised if he were to meet Sir Dudley Ross next day. Besides, he was not anxious, on any account, to be recognised by Dolly's husband, and his one satisfaction was in feeling that he had done her a small service that she would never know of. She

would never dream that he, Bruce Jefferies, had been the kind English doctor that the maid would speak of with gratitude, and he was resolved that never by his own act would he ever cross her path again, or disturb in any way the calm serenity of her married life, or tempt her to forget the present in allusions to the past.

But it must not be imagined that all his resolutions were made without a struggle, or that it cost him nothing to give up all that he most prized in the course of a few hours' meditation. The effort was a very great one, and told visibly upon him.

His friend Mellor was shocked at his appearance next morning when they met in the early dawn in the coffee-room before starting, but, like a true Englishman, forbore to notice anything or offer any kind of sympathy, and the two travelled all the way to London together without any exchange of confidence between them, or any attempts at conversation beyond the commonplaces of a traveller's dialogue. Such is the strange thing which we proudly call 'British reserve.' *Qui bono?*

CHAPTER XVI.

THREE YEARS AFTER.

'MY dear, did you know the Rosses were in town?'

'I knew they were coming, but had not heard of their arrival. Have you seen them to-day?'

'Yes; Ross was at the Club, and his wife came and fetched him in her "Victoria." She's a pretty little woman, Phyllis. Eh, don't you think so?'

'I only saw her once, you know,—at the Academy, last year, and then I thought her rather insignificant looking. I suppose we had better ask them to dinner?'

'By all means; and don't give them a stiff party. I like a small friendly one so much better, and so does Dudley, I know.'

'Sir Dudley would be very vexed if all the world were not asked to meet his wife the first season she is in town, John. I think I had better have my "at home" the same night, and kill all my birds with one stone. I will

fix it for Wednesday fortnight, and that will give nearly a three weeks' invitation.

'Very well,' replied her ever acquiescent spouse.

And accordingly, next morning, Dolly received a card of invitation to dinner from Sir John and Lady Redfern, for Wednesday the 15th, and with it was enclosed an 'at home' card for the same night.

'Shall I accept, Dudley?' she asked of her husband; and he replied carelessly,—

'Oh yes, of course. Sure to be a crush, but we must do the civil.'

Three years had passed since their marriage, and strangers had had very little opportunity hitherto of judging how the match had turned out. On their return from the Continent after their wedding tour they had settled down in the manor house at Woodhurst for the remainder of the year, when a little girl was born in December, and Dolly was left so delicate that for nearly a year she was almost a complete invalid; and when the next winter came she was ordered to Algeria, where she spent three months, after which the doctor recommended Egypt, and the prescription answered so well that by the summer she was quite strong again and thankful to return to England and her child, for Dudley had insisted on its being left behind with Mrs Ross, while they travelled abroad. He did not care for children, and it was a grievous disappointment to him

that this first-born had not been a boy. He could have put up with the inconvenience of a nursery and the frequent cries of the baby, had it meant a future gratification to himself in the shape of a son,—but a girl! who was, moreover, provokingly like her maternal grandmother, without a trace of his family in her, and for whom Dolly had suffered so much, and also made such a fuss with,—it disgusted him, and he took little pains to conceal his feelings from his wife, which alienated her more than ever from himself, and it was only the fortunate and timely arrival in the February preceding the opening of this chapter, of a son and heir, that restored him to good temper and prevented an open rupture between the never too congenial pair.

In April, therefore, he made up his mind to take Dolly up to town for the season, and Lady Redfern's invitation found them seated at breakfast, in the dining-room of a well-furnished house in Grosvenor Place, with every surrounding fitted to make them comfortable and happy.

Dolly was in the act of pouring out the tea when the door opened, and a tiny voice said, in baby accents,—

'Me tome to have jam, mamma.'

'Come along, my pet,' cried the mother, setting down the teapot, and turning to lift the child on to a chair beside her. 'What does Dot want?'

'*Jam*,' was the prompt reply.

Dolly proceeded to spread a piece of toast with jam, regardless of her husband's black looks and impatient tapping on the table with his knife.

'Bother that child!' he exclaimed at last. 'You forget everything when she's in the room. Can't you send her to the nursery for jam, and give me my tea? The dining-room is no place for babies.'

His wife did not reply, but, colouring painfully, she quickly poured out a cup of tea and handed it to her husband without a word.

Little Dot, all unconscious of her own obnoxious presence, went chattering on in her quaint way to herself as she munched her bread and jam, and Dolly had not the heart to send her away.

'I suppose the child has been taught to dislike its father,' presently remarked Dudley 'I noticed she avoided me as she came in, and you never make her come and say good morning to me. Come here, Dot!' he continued in a sharp voice to the little thing, who looked frightened directly, and verified his words by turning to her mother and saying plaintively,—

'Me not love papa. Me not tiss him.'

'Hush, hush, my darling,' exclaimed Dolly hastily. 'Dot mustn't say that. Go and kiss papa, like a good little girl. Do as mamma tells you.'

'Ha, ha!' laughed Dudley disagreeably. 'I

thought as much. Dot has been taught well, and I congratulate you, my lady, on having so completely succeeded in your education. The child shall obey me, though, if she stays here all night.'

Dolly's brown eyes opened wider than ever, and she looked at her husband indignantly.

'How can you say such a thing?' she replied warmly. 'What right have you to imagine I should teach my child disobedience to her own father? Whose fault is it that she never sees her father? Am I not always reproaching you with neglect of her, and can you wonder at a baby like this refusing to kiss the only person in the house that does not worship her, and the only person, too, that is ever actually harsh to her. Children are very sensitive, Dudley, and quick to see who loves them, and Dot is far too sharp not to have found out long ago that you don't care for her. But I think she will obey me.' And she turned gently to Dot, with a coaxing gesture.

'No, thank you,' retorted Dudley. 'If the child won't do it because I tell her, she must be *made* to, and I won't have you coax her. I declare I'll smack obedience into young Dudley, and I won't have him defy me in this way. Come here at once, Dot,' he thundered out in an angry voice.

Poor little Dot's brown eyes overflowed with hot tears, her red lips quivered, and,

hiding her little face in her mother's lap, she burst into a fit of sobbing.

'Me not tiss papa,' she gasped out between her sobs; 'me not love him; he naughty man.'

Dolly was distressed almost beyond self-control, and taking her child up in her arms, tried her utmost to soothe her and quiet her, and at last a happy thought struck her. If she kissed Dudley herself, probably Dot would follow suit, for she was a very imitative child, and would try always to copy everything her mother did.

'See, darling,' she said very gently, 'mamma loves papa, and so does Dot. Look! One kiss from mamma, and now—one from Dot!'

She got up as she spoke, and crossing over to where her husband sat, she bent down and kissed his forehead, and held the child out that she might do the same. Dot looked up with a very timid little face, but seeing her mother's sweet encouraging smile, she put forward her little rosebud mouth and imprinted a light kiss on her father's brow.

'There!' she exclaimed, with a comical little sigh; 'what a *dood* baby Dot is!' And in a moment she was laughing again and all sunshine, and even Dudley could not remain proof against her little winning ways.

Such scenes as this were of frequent occurrence, and the child was constantly the bone of contention between father and mother. The baby, though a greater favourite on account of

its sex, came in for its share of disparagement; and it was often a great struggle with Dolly to know how far she ought to sacrifice her maternal feelings to her husband's selfishness.

On the very night that they were to dine with the Redferns she was terribly exercised to know what was her duty to do; for about half-past six she was sitting in the drawing-room playing with Dot, when the nursemaid came down with a request from the nurse that her ladyship would go up at once and look at baby, for he seemed so very poorly. Dolly flew upstairs and found the child in the first stage of croup, which so alarmed her that she despatched a servant immediately for the doctor, who fortunately was just arriving at his own door when Lady Ross's summons came, and was able to drive off at once to see the baby. He pronounced it to be only a slight attack, and speedily relieved the mother's great anxiety, but of course ordered very careful treatment, and promised to look in later, about ten o'clock. Dolly was infinitely thankful for her boy's recovery, and totally forgot that she had to dress for dinner until her maid came into the nursery and suggested that she would be very late, for Sir Dudley was already dressed and downstairs waiting for the carriage.

'I can't leave baby!' was her first exclamation; and, following up her impulse, she ran downstairs to find her husband and beg him to take her excuses to Lady Redfern.

'Good gracious!' he exclaimed, as she entered his study in her afternoon dress, her hair rather rough, and looking pale and slightly alarmed still. 'What is the matter? why are you not ready? the carriage will be here in ten minutes.'

'Oh, Dudley, baby is so unwell, I can't leave him. Won't you let me off dining out to-night? if he is better, I will come to the "at home" afterwards, if you think I must do that even; but I have had to send for the doctor, and it seems wicked to leave the poor little fellow like this,' she pleaded.

'Nonsense,' he replied roughly. 'What will Lady Redfern say to her party being all upset for a baby. No, Dolly, you really must be reasonable to-night, and for once put your selfish feelings aside to please me; and there isn't time for arguing. Lady Redfern won't thank us for spoiling her dinner, and we shall now be fearfully late as it is. You must give the boy into nurse's charge, and try and remember that you are *my wife* as well as the boy's mother.'

She turned sadly away, seeing it was useless to appeal to his feelings further. So merely saying in a hurt tone,—

'It is of no use trying to make *you* feel for any one but yourself,' she left the study and went up to the nursery again, where she spent fully five minutes giving the nurse parting injunctions and fondling the now sleeping infant,

so that it only wanted twelve minutes to eight when she at last resigned herself to her maid's care, and allowed herself to be dressed out for a large London dinner party.

In Carter's expert hands, however, her toilet was very quickly got through, and it was only just striking eight as she ran downstairs fastening her bracelets to join her husband in the hall.

After all they were not late arriving in Grosvenor Square, for in London in the height of the season every one is allowed half-an-hour's grace, and it is not thought unusual to give an extra five minutes for the chief guests of the evening, which the Rosses were on this occasion.

So Dolly was received with a warmth almost bordering on effusiveness by her hostess, her husband speedily recovered his equanimity when he recognised a number of old acquaintances, and by the end of dinner he was in such good humour that he actually felt a twinge of pity for the little anxious mother that he had so ruthlessly brought away from her boy to please himself; so, as Lady Redfern made the sign for the ladies to move, he whispered to her,—

'Be charitable to my wife to-night, Lady Redfern, if she seems out of spirits, for our little boy is ill, and she is naturally anxious about him. You must give her some of your good advice, and teach her how to be calm and take these things more philosophically.'

The 'ladies' half-hour' was considerably curtailed on this occasion by the arrival of Lady Redfern's 'at home' guests, and Dolly hailed them as her deliverers. Dudley would surely allow her to make her escape early now that she had done all that was required of her, and when once the room was full no one would notice her disappearance.

She glanced anxiously at the clock, and seeing it was only a quarter-past ten, she thought if she could get home by a quarter to eleven very likely she might be in time to see Dr Prescott. He would probably be later than he said, and it would be such a relief to her to get home and assure herself of the child's safety.

But a further ordeal was in store for her, for as she made her way gradually to where her husband was standing she was waylaid by an old gentleman they had met abroad, and who evidently had not any intention of letting her go directly, for he plied her with questions as to where she and Sir Dudley had gone after he had parted from them, what she thought of Venice, Rome, Naples, etc., etc.—in short, fairly catechised her on her foreign tour, and, though she was too well-bred to show it, she felt excessively bored.

She was standing just then with her back towards the door by which the people were arriving, and the buzz of conversation made it almost impossible even for Lady Redfern to

hear the names of her guests as they were announced. By a sudden chance and a slight lull in the busy talk, the words '*Mr and Mrs Jefferies*,' called out in a stentorian voice, fell upon Dolly's quick ear. She felt exactly as if a bucket of cold water had suddenly been thrown over her, and she involuntarily turned so ashy pale that her old friend stopped in his cross-examining, and wondered what was the matter with his fair listener.

He was a bachelor and therefore not hardened to the sight of a ladies fainting-fit like a married man invariably is (the latter always imagines it proceeds directly or indirectly with the over exertions on the part of the maid to reduce her lady's waist to the smallest possible span, and a smelling-bottle does not occur to his mind so readily as a pair of scissors. The emotions are not brought much into account when a lady turns white and faint, though probably the mind affects the circulation more than people think, and a sudden shock may prove more fatal to the heart's action than any amount of prolonged pressure from without).

'You look tired, Lady Ross,' was the old gentleman's remark. There is a vacant seat behind you, pray sit down while you can, and I will fetch you a glass of wine or something to pick you up.'

'Oh, no, thank you,' Dolly replied hastily; 'I am quite well really, only rather tired, and the rooms are so hot now. I want to find my

husband and get him to go home. Have you seen him anywhere?'

'I saw him leave the room about ten minutes ago, and will go and find him for you if you will sit here until I return.'

So Lady Ross was left alone to recover herself and watch the pair whose arrival had affected her so strangely. There he was! How well she knew every line of his figure, every look of his face.

How it all rushed back upon her, the last time she had seen him, that hot summer evening, nearly four years ago! when he had stood on the platform waving his hand to her as the train bore her away on that miserable visit to Scotland, and his last words echoing in her ears, 'God bless you, my own Theodora!'

How old he looked now! His face was lined and haggard, and his eyes had a restless, absent expression that Dolly had never seen in them before; his hair, too, was slightly streaked with grey, and no one would have guessed that Bruce Jefferies was only thirty-one. He looked much more like forty-one. His quiet, thoughtful manner gave people a further impression that he was older, and it was a distinct advantage to him in his profession, for every one prefers an elderly doctor to a young one.

The servant had announced '*Mrs* Jefferies,' so Dolly searched anxiously for her, and it was not difficult to find her. She was standing close to Bruce, holding on to his elbow, as if

frightened of being separated from him by the crowd of ladies and gentlemen who push each other about in a drawing-room quite as much as they do in any other place, and this little woman was evidently not accustomed to it.

She and Mr Jefferies were standing with their backs turned, but otherwise quite near to where Dolly was sitting, hidden to view by an enormously stout lady, who found it the best and coolest policy to take up her position in one place, and not move from it until it was time to go home, and every one had had time to make quite sure that she had been at Lady Redfern's 'at home,' the one aim of all London people being never to enjoy themselves (that is quite beside the mark), but to 'have been seen' at all the fashionable crushes and dull receptions during the season.

So though this stout lady considerably impeded Dolly's vision, she was not solid enough to interfere much with her hearing, and every now and then she could catch what Mr and Mrs Jefferies were saying to each other.

'Do you know all these people, Bruce?' she asked of him, and he replied,—

'My dear Cynthia! No, indeed I do not. I scarcely see any one I know, in fact. Ah! there is a friend of ours. Mr Bennett, you remember seeing him in Melbourne the day of that dreadful pic-nic, when Miss Johnstone nearly killed him with a blow from a tennis ball off her racquet?' And at that moment a

little dark man pushed his way up to them and shook hands warmly, exclaiming in a loud voice,—

'Who would have thought of seeing *you* here!'

And if an enterprising quartette of amateurs had not at that instant struck up a brilliant and noisy vocal performance in the back drawing-room, Mr Bennett's next question to Mrs Jefferies would have eased Dolly's mind considerably, for he asked her where her husband was, and she replied gaily,—

'Oh, in bed, of course, lazy old man; he hates going out, so my good *son* takes care of me.'

Then they all laughed, which Dolly saw, though she could not hear the joke, and consequently her woman's jealousy was further roused, and she began cordially to hate this little 'Cynthia' with her big childish blue eyes and smiling white teeth and fairy-like figure.

'How could he care for such a little wax-doll as that?' thought she; 'he never admired flaxen-haired beauties, and used to care more for an intellectual companion than a pretty plaything. I am sure she must bore him dreadfully,' and with quite unconscious conceit she added, 'Poor Bruce, is that the fate I have driven him to? Ah, well it is no use speculating on what might have been. I am glad he has forgotten me if he is happy, but I can't believe *she* makes him so.'

Her husband came up a moment afterwards and granted her request to go home, and thankful indeed was the poor little thing to make her escape. Her heart was too full for her to speak during their drive home, and Dudley thought her more difficult than ever to understand, and more unlike any other woman he had ever met than when he had married her.

Great was her relief on asking what the doctor had said of the baby, to learn that the child was much better and quite out of danger, and for the next few months all went smoothly, and there was at least outward calm if not inward peace in the house of Dudley Ross.

CHAPTER XVII.

'FAREWELL, A LONG FAREWELL.'

IN the bedroom of a large Elizabethan house in Northamptonshire, a sick man was lying tossing about in bed, evidently in great pain, for every now and then he would groan and change his position, and then, with another groan, turn back again.

'What is the time, Thomson,' he inquired for the seventh time that day, and the servant answered quietly,—

'Half-past four, Sir Dudley,' adding, 'her ladyship will be here in a few minutes now, and I will go down and bring her up at once, Sir Dudley.'

Almost as he spoke a carriage drove up to the front door, and a light little figure sprang out of it, and was received in the hall by the lady of the house.

'Am I in time?' was her first anxious question.

'Yes,' was the reply, 'but, dear Lady Ross,

you must be prepared to find your husband very, very ill; and you must forgive me if I urge you not to allow him to see you are upset by this terrible shock, for Dr Molton told me an hour ago that the one chance of his recovery lies in keeping him absolutely quiet and free from excitement.'

'Then there is *some* hope?' inquired the anxious wife.

'I fear very little,' was Mrs Burton's kindly spoken reply. 'I have got some soup ready for you, Lady Ross, which I must beg you to drink, so that you may be fit to stay with your husband for the next few hours without interruption. Yes, Thomson, Lady Ross shall go to Sir Dudley in a moment; but she must keep up her own strength, or she will not be fit to nurse.'

Dolly obeyed mechanically the request of her kind hostess, and drank the soup quickly; then laying aside her jacket and hat, that Dudley might not imagine she was not going to stay and nurse him, she smoothed her hair, and prepared herself for her task of ministering to him.

He was lying very still, with his eyes closed, when she went into his room, and it was not until she was close up to him that he was aware of her arrival.

'At last, Dolly!' he exclaimed, and seized her hand eagerly.

'Yes, dear, I have come as quickly as I

could; and now I am going to help you to get well,' she replied gently, and stroking his hair back lightly from his forehead.

'This is a bad job, isn't it child?' he said. 'It was all that confounded idiot of a parson crossing right over in front of me. Parsons have no right to fox-hunt.'

'Hush, dear, don't talk and excite yourself. You must keep quiet now, and you can tell me all about it another day when you are better.'

'I shall never get better,' was his reply, then asked her suddenly, 'Are the children here?'

'No, I came alone,' Dolly answered.

'Without a maid! I hope not,' he said, mindful even in this last hour, of the conventionalities of travelling for his wife.

She half smiled as she reassured him that Carter, her maid, had come with her, and then he continued,—

'Then no one will want you, or call you away, and I can have you all to myself?'

She pressed his hand gently and kissed his forehead lovingly. His words were a reproach to her, for she knew she had often made him feel how much more she loved her children than her husband, and in the next hour that followed she had ample time for reflection and meditation over her past shortcomings, for Dudley sank into an uneasy slumber, and fearing to move lest she should wake him, stood all the time, still holding his hand, and looking at him. The sight of his face, so

terribly changed by the acute suffering of the last twenty-four hours, touched her inexpressibly, and she poured out her soul in longings for his recovery, that she might atone for her want of love to him, and make him a better wife in the future.

It was quite dark when he awoke again, for the month was November, and the days are short then ; but, though it was only seven o'clock, the moon was shining brightly, and a ray of light streamed into the sick-room from it, and increased rather than diminished the depression which was creeping over Dolly.

Dudley seemed weaker, instead of refreshed, after his sleep, and his voice was so low when he first spoke again that Dolly could hardly catch what he said. She bent down that she might hear better, and found he was asking for brandy, which she gave him, and it seemed to revive him and give him a little strength.

'Are we quite alone?' he asked presently.

'Yes, dear, only I am with you,' she answered.

'Dolly, my own little wife,' he said, and his voice was trembling as he spoke, with a great effort, 'I have been a selfish fellow, I know, and you have been an angel to me, but I have loved you as much as any man could have done, and you will forgive me. Won't you for—'

A spasm of pain here stopped his speech, and she implored him not to say more, but to

lie quite still. But, as soon as it was past, he resumed,—

'Forgive me for that letter—Jefferies's letter—it was done out of love for you. Forgive me, darling, now I am going.'

'Dudley, my dearest husband, do not speak of what is so long ago past. It is I who have to ask your forgiveness for being so often cold and unsympathetic to you. If only you recover, we will be so much more to each other, and I will be a better wife to you.'

He smiled sadly, and, drawing her down to him, kissed her fondly on her lips.

'It is hard to leave you, my child,' he whispered, 'hard to have to go alone. But, Dolly, do you think—have you any idea where I am going?'

He clasped her more fondly to him, and she scarcely knew how to answer him, but she steadied her voice with a great effort, and replied softly,—

'You are only passing from one state of life into another, and death is but the transition, dear!'

He seemed satisfied with her answer, and lay for a few moments quite still and silent; then a terrible spasm took hold of him again, and, with a convulsive grasp of her hand, a last look of intense love at her face, and the word 'Dolly' on his lips, his spirit passed away, and his wife was a widow.

For the first few days she bore up wonder-

fully, and went about with the utmost composure, telegraphing and writing all that was necessary to the various relatives and persons connected with her husband; and the Burtons, in whose house Dudley's death had occurred, marvelled at her strength and presence of mind.

The funeral was arranged to take place on the Tuesday following the Friday on which Sir Dudley had died, but on Sunday Dolly received a letter from his mother, urging her to have the body removed to Woodhurst and interred in the family vault, and so peremptory was the tone of the Dowager Lady Ross's letter, that Dolly did not like to disregard it; she accordingly braced herself up for the further effort, and, with the kind assistance of Mr Burton, made all the arrangements for the transit. On Tuesday evening she arrived at home again with her sad charge, and was accompanied by both Mr and Mrs Burton, who were very indignant with old Lady Ross for imposing such a task upon the poor little widow, and were determined they would not leave her until they had handed her over to the care of some one fitted to look after her.

She looked so white and fragile when she stepped out of the carriage and entered her own house, where her mother and little Dot were waiting to welcome her, and when they led her upstairs into her own room, and further self-restraint was unnecessary, she gave way and broke down completely.

Mrs Ross took the utmost care of her, and was really thankful to see the tears flow so freely; for, after all her daughter had gone through, it was so unnatural for her to remain calm, and apparently unmoved.

It had all been a terrible experience to Dolly—the very suddenness of the whole thing was the most trying part. Only that day week Dudley had left her at the manor house with her mother and children, to spend a few days at the Burtons' place in Northamptonshire for some hunting, and they had parted so happily. He had laughed at what he called her 'Cockney fears' for his safety out hunting, and reassured her completely before he left, so that it was a great shock to her on going up to her bedroom on Thursday night to have a telegram brought to her which, on tearing open with trembling fingers and a beating heart, she read as follows:—

'Sir Dudley has met with a bad accident out hunting. Come as soon as you can.'

She flew into her mother's room, and the two consulted together over Bradshaw as to the quickest manner in which Dolly might get to her husband. The last train had already left Woodhurst, and though there was one at seven o'clock next morning, she would gain nothing by taking it instead of the nine o'clock express, for the latter caught the fast train to Northampton at one o'clock from London, while the earlier one would only give her two long hours to wait

at King's Cross, and was therefore useless. The night of suspense and anxiety, the long, wearisome journey, with its endless changes and stoppages, the excitement of seeing her husband so terribly changed, all followed by his sudden end, had in itself been enough to tell upon her delicate frame, and having had the further strain put upon her of arranging so troublesome a funeral, with the additional harass of unsympathetic and disagreeable letters from her mother-in-law, it was no wonder that the doctor pronounced Lady Ross to be in a very critical state when he came to see her the evening she arrived at Woodhurst, and forbade her to see any one excepting her mother for a whole week.

Dudley had left his affairs in perfect order, and had settled everything most carefully upon his wife until his son should come of age and inherit his property. He left full instructions that the boy was to be educated at Eton and Oxford, but beyond this Dolly was not hampered by any of his wishes, and was free to live where she pleased, and do exactly what she liked with her money and her children.

She decided to take a small house in London for the winter, as she could not bear the large, rambling, old manor house when the leaves were off the trees and the wind howled all round it. It reminded her painfully, too, of that wretched time she and her mother had spent there before her marriage, and she could

not bear the associations which this recollection called up in her mind.

So she took a very pretty, comfortably-furnished house in South Kensington, and settled herself there with her two children, who were more than ever the all-absorbing interest of her life now that she could devote herself entirely to them without causing jealous pangs to anybody; and if any thought crossed her mind of the existence of Bruce Jefferies in connection with her own past life, the image of that fair-haired, blue-eyed 'Cynthia' would always appear before her standing by his side and clinging hold of his arm, and the result of such a recollection would generally cause her to snatch up her little daughter and cover her with passionate kisses, exclaiming, 'Dot is mamma's idol now!'

It was impossible, of course, for her to make a show of broken-heartedness over her husband's death, for it had been a strained relationship from first to last, but she felt genuinely sorry for Dudley's sudden death, and the sweetness of her nature made her forget much of the past, which had been sad, and dwell only on the fact that her children were left fatherless, and that it devolved upon her to bring up her son aright. People wondered at her quiet contentment, but then no one had known the story of her life, and how that it was only her strong sense of duty which had made her the wife she was to Sir Dudley.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A VOICE FROM THE PAST.

'One voice speaks, in tones, I thought
The past for ever kept;
But now I know, deep in my heart.
Its echoes only slept.'—*A. Proctor.*

IT was a year since Dudley Ross had died, and Dolly had remained on in her little South Kensington home, not caring to move out of London, and leading a very quiet, contented life. Mrs Ross spent most of her time with her, for the children were a great interest to her, and in her old age she was becoming much softer and less querulous. The boy was her special pet, and there was no doubt about his being by far the best looking of the two children. Dot was very fascinating, and was a perfect miniature likeness of her mother, but Dudley was unlike father or mother, and developed a style of beauty of his own that was quite unaccountable. Even Lady Ross, his grandmother, condescended to admire him, and declared he was the image of one of her husband's ancestors, whose picture hung in the

library at the manor house, and as far as a baby of two years can be thought like an old man of sixty or seventy, possibly there was a great resemblance between the two Dudleys. The dark blue eyes and the fair, almost white hair were probably the real reasons for the likeness, and it was odd that the child should have escaped inheriting the bright colouring that was the peculiarity of both his father and mother, for red hair and a clear skin is more invariably reproduced than any other type of colouring, and very thankful was the young man to have escaped inheriting his father's nickname when he went to Eton, and learnt that 'Ross Rufus' might have been his title but for his flaxen hair.

One Saturday afternoon Dolly, fond as ever of music, went to one of the popular concerts, and left the house in charge of Mrs Ross. It was a bitterly cold day, and as Dudley seemed to have a little wheeziness on his chest, Dolly had given orders that he was not to go out. Mrs Ross was sitting in the drawing-room working quietly by herself, when Dot came tumbling into the room in a way quite peculiar to herself, and gasping out,—

'Oh, grannie, Dudley is so very ill, and Nana is most dreffully frightened.'

'Grannie' started up and flew into the nursery to ascertain the truth of this alarming report, and found the poor little boy attacked by his old enemy, the croup. The nurse and

she did all they could to relieve him, and waited anxiously for his mother's return, not liking to take upon themselves the responsibility of sending for a doctor, as Dolly had lately expressed her intention of placing the children under homœopathy, should they ever require medical treatment.

They had not long to wait, for she was home by half-past five, and the question then arose who they should send for. Dolly hunted up the address, at last, of a homœopathic practitioner who lived in Lowndes Square, and who had been very highly recommended to her by a friend, and accordingly despatched her maid in a cab, instructing her to bring the doctor back with her if possible.

A carriage was at the doctor's door as the maid drove up, and she was just in time to catch Dr Truro as he was rushing out of his house again and jumping into his brougham.

'Eh, what? Croup. Onslow Gardens. Can't possibly come, my dear woman. Going off to Brighton to see Lady C— Urgent case. Very sorry, very sorry. Stop! I will call round and send my partner. What number in Onslow Gardens? All right. Go on, coachman,' and the door banged, the carriage drove off at full speed, and Lady Ross's maid was left in indignant astonishment at the *brusquerie* of the doctor.

'Humph!' she grunted, as she got into her cab again and drove home. '*He* ain't no loss to

her ladyship. I only hope his partner will be less snappish, or he will frighten poor little Sir Dudley from croup into fits.'

Fortunately Dr Truro's partner was at home, so he quickly jumped into a cab and drove to Lady Ross's house, not knowing in the least whom he was going to see, or what the case was he had been called in to attend, for his erratic partner had merely given him a very incoherent account, and the address he was to find, and had rushed off again to his Brighton patient before there was time for further questioning or explanation.

'Will you please walk upstairs, sir,' was the servant's greeting as he entered the hall, and the doctor complied with the request. The nurse received him in the day-nursery and explained to him briefly the case, then she led him into the back-room, which was quite dark, and where the mother was sitting with her child in her arms wondering why the doctor was so long coming. She rose and came forward to meet him as he groped his way after the nurse, and said in a tone of interrogation to him,—

'Dr Truro?'

'Dr Truro has been called away, I am sorry to say, to Brighton to a very urgent case, so he sent me to see if I could be of any service to you. It is a case of croup the nurse tells me?'

The words were spoken courteously, and the voice was strangely familiar to her, but she did

not allow herself to stop and recall what it reminded her of. She desired the nurse to bring a light, and then the fact revealed itself. *Bruce Jefferies* was the doctor that had been thus sent to her by chance. It was impossible that either of them should meet thus without a feeling of awkwardness after their long separation, and he was the first to break the silence.

'I had no idea,' he said, 'to whose house I had been summoned, Lady Ross, when I entered it, or I should not have intruded myself upon you; but now that I am here I hope you will allow me to do all I can for your child. Is he subject to these attacks?'

'Oh yes,' she answered, thankful to get upon so safe a subject, for it struck her painfully how cold and formal was his manner, and how utterly unmoved he appeared to be by this strange rencontre. 'I have had frequent alarms about him, and I thought homœopathy might perhaps be more effectual with him than the other system, which always seems to weaken him and leave him more susceptible than before.

No more was said by either of them until Dr Jefferies took his departure. He mixed some medicines for the little patient, and wrote clear directions for their administration, then turning to Lady Ross said quietly,—

'I think he will be much better by to-morrow. I will call in the morning before eleven and see

him, and if Dr Truro returns shall I ask him to come on Monday?'

'As you like,' she replied, holding his outstretched hand, and trying hard to look as indifferent as he did; 'perhaps—I daresay my little boy will be quite well by to-morrow evening and will not require either of you. Thank you very much for coming. Good evening.'

He returned her 'Good evening' abruptly, and left the room. When he got outside the door he drew a long breath, and exclaimed to himself, 'What a curious coincidence! how sweet she looked, and how sad. I had no idea she was living in London. Strange fate that has brought us together; but never again can I trust a woman who so deceived me. Now I wish I had not met her again. If only I could hear from her own lips that there had been foul play somewhere else besides with that dreadful old Mrs Clark, and that she had been forced into marrying Sir Dudley Ross. But no, it was a wild idea, and only showed how foolishly he worshipped the shadow of his idol even now. She had been too weak to resist the soft words and gentle pleadings of another man, and had yielded as readily, as all women do, to the temptation of the hour, regardless of consequences. No! he must bear his burden to the end of his life. He would keep his secret to himself to the last hour of his existence, and if fate compelled him to meet

Dolly Ross, under any circumstances whatever, she should remain *Lady Ross* to him throughout, and no one should say Bruce Jefferies had twice been made a fool of.'

These were his reflections as he strode home along the Brompton Road to his own house, still in Wilton Place; and these were Dolly's as she watched her sleeping child that evening all alone in the dimly-lighted night nursery.

'He has quite forgotten me! Somehow I did not think it ever could be so, but I am glad, yes—I hope I *am* glad—he has forgotten me. We have changed situations now—he is tied, while I am free again. I wish I had asked after his wife, but then he would wonder how I knew he was married. Ah, Cynthia Jefferies, you don't understand your husband, or you would not let him carry about such a sad, care-worn face. You do not know his nature, or you would soothe him and make him bright. Perhaps she is dead! How can I find out?'

She had a great mind not to meet him again, and to make attendance at church an excuse for being absent next morning when he should call; but the sound of a hard, metallic cough from the nursery, as she went up again after breakfast to see her boy, sent all thoughts of herself out of her head, and she instantly determined to stay with little Dudley at all costs.

During this second visit Bruce and she did not exchange a single word beyond the

necessary conventional phrases of greeting and parting; but though the doctor paid but a short visit to his patient, he spent some time in the house, for he was waylaid by Dot on the stairs as he was going out, and she so fascinated him with her quaint speeches and striking resemblance to her mother, that he allowed her to drag him into the dining-room and show him her special cupboard where she kept her first lesson book, and before he had left the house these two were fast friends; as he said good-bye, kindly patting her golden head, she put up her little earnest face and said regretfully,—

'Not a kiss for poor Dot?'

How could he help kissing the sweet upturned mouth? but he did so with a sort of reverential feeling as if he were paying homage to a relic of a saint—for this child was a part of the woman he had once worshipped—and she was no ordinary child to him.

Mrs Ross had not heard of the strange coincidence which had brought Dolly and her old lover face to face again, and she was therefore considerably mystified by her little grandchild's conversation at luncheon that Sunday.

Dot was eating her pudding with unusual solemnity, and had not spoken for more than five minutes—a very rare silence for her to keep, especially at meal-time—and at last she laid down her spoon, and with her little head

on one side and her big eyes fixed on her mother, she said gravely,—

'Mother, I think Dr Jefferies must be a very clever man. Don't you?'

'Yes, dear,' said absently.

'I mean, I think, he must be wonderfully clever, because he has made Dudley better so very quickly, and he is *so* kind. He let me show him my lesson book, and he is coming one day to hear me read. Mother, I *love* Dr Jefferies. Don't you?'

This very embarrassing question Dolly fortunately escaped answering by the interposition of Mrs Ross, who, of course, caught the name of Jefferies, and asked sharply of her daughter what Dot meant.

'Well, mamma,' said Dolly, 'I was going to tell you that Dr Truro had been called away, it seems, to Brighton just as Jane arrived with my request to him to come yesterday evening, so he sent his partner, who turns out to be the Mr Jefferies—Bruce Jefferies in fact—that we knew once.'

Horror was clearly depicted on Mrs Ross's face as Dolly made this announcement.

'Good gracious!' she ejaculated, 'you don't mean to allow *that man* into your house again. Surely Dolly you cannot have forgotten all that was discovered about him, and how—

'Mamma, I forget *nothing*,' replied Dolly with dignity—'least of all that Mr Jefferies was cruelly wronged—and that whatever may have

been his antecedents, he was always a gentleman. He will attend Dudley professionally, and we shall never have occasion to refer to the past.'

Mrs Ross shrugged her shoulders and let the subject drop. She knew her daughter too well to argue with her now, but she mentally prophesied evil results from the renewal of this bygone friendship, and firmly resolved to set her face against it.

The case of typhoid fever that Dr Truro had been called to Brighton to attend proved such a severe one that the relatives and friends of the patient urged him to stay on in attendance, and so persistent were they with their entreaties that the doctor was forced to telegraph to his partner on Monday that he would not be back till Wednesday at the earliest, and that he (Jefferies) must therefore call on all his patients for him, and inform them of this enforced absence.

As Dudley Ross was so much better when Dr Jefferies sent round to inquire on Monday morning, the doctor thought it wiser not to call till the next day, and Dr Truro's patients kept him so fully employed that he could not find time for his Onslow Gardens visit until about half-past eight on Tuesday evening. He really was very vexed at having to come so late, for he knew the little boy would be asleep, and Lady Ross would probably think it an intrusion at that hour. He was ushered into the drawing-

room, and as the door opened the scene that met his eye was so familiar that he could fancy himself back again in Southwick Street.

Mrs Ross was leaning back half-asleep in her chair—her favourite position after dinner—and Dolly was playing the piano, just as she used to do in old days. Except her widow's cap, too, she might have been the identical girl, for she looked very little older. Since her husband's death—and the strain of duty was relaxed for her—she had recovered her looks and had grown a little stouter, which was a decided improvement. Her cheeks, too, had regained their original freshness, and people often said 'Lady Ross was far too pretty and young not to marry again.'

Even the momentary glimpse of her at the piano and the very brief enjoyment of her music was enough to soften the usually stern, cynical expression in Bruce's face, and as Dolly hastily jumped up to greet him upon the servant's announcement of his name, she was surprised to see that look again which she had missed so much from his face on both the occasions that she had seen him since their parting—at Lady Redfern's 'at home' and on his first visit to her child.

Their greeting was distant as ever, however, and Mrs Ross was frigid as ice to Dr Jefferies. This was quite unaccountable to him, for though he could understand a certain degree of stiffness,

being perfectly natural on Dolly's part—from shyness and consciousness of having ill-treated him—he could not in the least discover any reason for the same demeanour in Mrs Ross; for, of course, he knew nothing of Sir Dudley Ross's treachery nor Mrs Clark's either, and imagined that the real reason of his journey to Australia was totally unknown to any one. He therefore set it down to the peculiar disposition of the lady, and remembered how uncertain she always was—cold one day and polite even to effusion the next. It did not trouble him much, for he cared nothing for her individually, and she would not have been flattered could she have heard his mental judgment of the manner which she had imagined was a very effectually chilling one.

'You will find my little boy wonderfully better, I think, Dr Jefferies,' said Lady Ross, as she led the way to the nursery.

'I am very glad, I am sure. Your little girl and I made great friends on Sunday. How like she is to you, Lady Ross! I should have known her if I had met her anywhere.'

'Yes. I believe she is considered like me. My son is like his father's family.'

'Ah, indeed! Sir Dudley was the only member of the family I ever saw. Your little boy does not remind me much of him.'

'No?'

The professional visit over, Dr Jefferies turned to Lady Ross and said,—

'I do not think the child requires further treatment now. I will leave some medicine for him to take to-morrow morning, and you will, of course, be careful with him for the next few days. Keep him warmly wrapped up, and watch the winds for him. I will not call again, unless you send for me. My address is Wilton Place.'

'Still?' was Dolly's involuntary exclamation.

'Yes, still, Lady Ross. Why not?'

It was cruel of him to ask her such a question, and take advantage of her momentary forgetfulness of their new position as strangers to each other, but he could not resist keeping her there a moment longer talking to him. It was heaven to hear her voice again, and the merest common-places coming from her lips remained engraven in his memory.

She stammered out, 'I thought you might have moved. I heard you were married—and I imagined that house might have been too small for you. I beg your pardon for asking.'

'You heard I was married? Then I am afraid you have been misinformed, Lady Ross,' he answered bitterly. 'I loved a woman truly once, but she deceived me and blighted my life, and never again could I trust myself in the hands of another.'

His words stung her to the quick, but her pride came to her rescue, and clutching hold of the bed, near which they were both standing, she said in a low voice,—

'Women, too, are some times betrayed; they are often deceived and cruelly wronged, and they are apt to be tempted in a moment of weakness, and succumb to the temptation, and no one pities them, though they may suffer a life-long agony.'

He looked at her steadfastly and his heart beat fast. Was she talking of herself as of a woman who had been betrayed and deceived, and if so, by whom? Not by himself, for had she not had his two letters, and could she not have rested on the assurances they contained? He thought he would put one question to her, and leave it to chance what further explanation her answer brought about.

'Forgive a direct question, Lady Ross, but will you tell me if you ever received two letters of mine, one dated September, the other December?'

'Not until too late,' was her reply, given unhesitatingly, as she lifted up her face and looked at him straight in the eyes.

He sprang forward a step and put out his hand to clasp hers, and spoke eagerly,—

'Then you did not know why I had gone to Australia. You believed I had gone without letting you know? You imagined I had left you, *forsaken* you in fact? Oh, Dolly! Dolly! how could you let them so misrepresent me? Had I not sworn to love you and be faithful to you, and did I not believe that my vow to you and yours to me were as binding as any mar-

riage vow? I trusted you through all your silence! Why did you not trust me in the same way?'

'Bruce,' she said, and the tears were gathering in her eyes, 'I can never tell you all, for the memory of the dead is sacred to me; and a full explanation would implicate more persons than myself. I scarcely dare ask you to forgive me for all the suffering I have caused you, but if you will try and believe that I was not as wicked and heartless as I appeared, I shall be indeed thankful that we have met once more. God knows my life has been wretched enough some times, and I have suffered in one way as much as you have in another. But that is not to the point now. I ask your forgiveness before we part again.'

'And must we part again? If we have both suffered so much apart, can we not help to heal each other's hearts by taking up the broken thread of our love and joining it together again? Is your love quite dead, Dolly?'

A sob came by way of an answer, and he went on very gently, holding her passive little hand all the time,—

'Life has been very dreary to me ever since we parted that fatal evening when you went to Scotland.' (Dolly shivered as he recalled it.) 'The shock which your marriage gave me nearly killed my soul, and if only I could hear that my shipwreck was never caused by your hand, and that you did not wilfully deceive me,

I think—yes, I really think—I should feel a new creature. I want no implications of a third party, but now, as we are standing face to face, Dolly, tell me, was I ever mistaken in believing you deliberately faithless?'

'Bruce, I have only been too faithful to you. My love has never swerved for one single instant. All through my married life I never ceased to love you; though I know I stifled it and conscientiously strove to do my duty to my husband. I trusted you so entirely that I believed your silence meant you were dead; and in a moment of sorrowful, pitiful weakness, both of mind and body, I yielded to my cousin's entreaties and became his wife three or four days before I received your second letter, written from Melbourne. How could I answer it except by acknowledging myself worse than unfaithful to you—in declaring myself unfaithful to my husband; and I could only trust that when you discovered the truth your love would so turn to hate that it would not blight your life, and that you would soon find some one far worthier than I to make you happy. I heard you were married, and saw the girl they called "Mrs Jefferies"—"Cynthia," her other name was,—and I hoped and prayed that she might have taken my place in your heart and healed the wound which I had inflicted. But now—'

'But now, Dolly, since that "Cynthia" was my little step-mother, and not my wife at all,

perhaps you will let me tell you who *is* the only person that can make me happy again and forget the past, and who only is worthy to take the place of my old love.'

'Yes. What is her name?'

'Her name. Shall I tell it you? Then come here, that I may say it quite low. It is my *new* love, my own Dolly. She is mine now, indeed, if she will trust herself once more into my keeping. My darling, what do you say?'

'Nothing, Bruce. I am yours "till death us do part."'

. . . . . .

'Dear me, Phyllis, here's Lady Ross married again, and to Dr Jefferies, too! How on earth could she have come across him? Look here.'

And Lady Redfern read in the *Times* of the —th January, 'At St Peter's, Eaton Square, by the Rev. ——, Bruce Jefferies, M.D., of Wilton Place, S.W., to Dorothea, widow of the late Sir Dudley Ross, Bart., of Woodhurst, Kent.'

And so Dolly Ross became Dolly Jefferies after all. In changing her name she only became the more her real self, and though her children bore the title of Ross, that was all that remained to remind her of a marriage which had so nearly ruined her own life and that of him she loved better than all.

All's well that ends well, and I fancy the many twisted skeins that are scattered about

in the world might oftener be unravelled and smoothly wound off if patience, faith, and discernment were employed in the first pulling out of the thread. It is impatience and unbelief which makes the first knot, and then woe to the thread if it break and cannot be joined, and has to be thrown away as hopelessly useless.

'I know not. Who knoweth? Our own souls we scarcely do know.
And none knows his brothers, who judges, condemns, or bewails,
Or mocketh, or praiseth. In this world's strange vanishing show,
The one truth is *loving*. Oh, friend, the dark cloud that veils
All life lets this rift through to glorify future and past,
Love ever, love only, love faithfully, love to the last.'

THE END.

COLSTON AND SON, PRINTERS, EDINBURGH.